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MARIAMNE;

OR,

THE QUEEN'S FATE.

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MARIAMNE;

55-46

OR,

THE QUEEN'S FATE.

A TALE OF

The Days of Herod.

BY

E. H. M.

New-York:
PUBLISHED BY
PUDNEY & RUSSELL, 79 JOHN-STREET,
AND DAYTON & BURDICK, 29 ANN-STREET.

1856.

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PREFACE.

AROUND every event of the wondrous Era of the Salvation of the human race, is arrayed a halo of intense interest, which the instinctive curiosity of every religious mind is ever anxious and striving to penetrate.

And when the subject for investigation is one of the most salient actors in that great Divine Drama which has left such giant impress on future ages, Heterodoxy itself would feel abashed at the betrayal of a luke-warmness in its perusal.

The author of the following pages trusts, that in the recital of events of an awe-arousing epoch in a familiar and interesting manner, that the gentle delights of the Romance have been effectively blessed with those of the Christian Reader.

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THE QUEEN'S FATE.

CHAPTER I.

The Queen of Judea, and the Princess Alexandria.

THE day had been oppressively hot, the sluggish wind blew in gusts, and swept across the sandy desert; but as the sun went down behind Mount Sion, a refreshing breeze from the sea sprang up, stirring the thick branches of the stately cedars, and fanning the broad leaves of the graceful palm.

The streets of Jerusalem were filled with a motley multitude: Jew and Gentile—princes and ambassadors—strangers from every part—came to witness the games prepared by Herod, in honor of Cæsar.

They were to commence on the morrow. Surrounding Herod's palace were extensive gardens and pleasure grounds, brilliantly illuminated upon this

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festive occasion, and thrown open for the inspection and amusement of the populace. Gaily decorated tents, under which were spread tables loaded with viands—delicate enough to have tempted the palate of an *Alcibiades*—were reared upon the green sward, and around the margin of the artificial lakes and canals; upon whose placid surface were myriads of gold and silver fish, scared from their repose by the blaze of light reflected upon their surface. Sumptuous preparations for the entertainment of the king's more immediate friends, were also making within the palace; while at every inn and public place of entertainment, strangers were feasted at Herod's expense.

In a remote part of the royal residence, entirely removed from the present scene of revelry, and opening upon a terraced garden, was a magnificent suite of apartments, furnished with regal splendor, and appropriated to Mariamne, the most beautiful and best beloved of Herod's wives.

In one of the largest of these rooms, with all the windows thrown open to admit the cool, soft air, and the blue and purple curtains looped far back into the golden rings, reclined upon a couch the youthful queen, with her mother, the princess Alexandra, while sporting at its side were two lovely children, scarcely past

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their infancy. No description can do justice to the royal grandeur and beauty of this chamber. Its walls of carved cedar, in which were inserted mirrors reaching from floor to ceiling—its broad, golden cornice, so exquisitely graven with representations of ivy branches and tendrils of the vine, sending forth clusters of grapes—the slender pillars of yellow and red chalcedony, shooting up so gracefully, and supporting the lofty and beautifully-painted ceiling—the golden branches, four or five feet high, with their bowls for the reception of candles carved and shaped like half-blown lilies—its tables and cabinets of beryl, agate, and sandal wood, the latter inlaid with gold and mother-of-pearl—its low couches and divans, of ivory and gold, with their piles of luxurious cushions, covered with blue, and scarlet, and purple, and damasked with flowers—its Persian mats, so thick and soft, and wrought so naturally with birds and flowers, they seemed ready to spring into life beneath the tread—the floor of rich and many-colored mosaic—the statues and pictures—the sparkling fountain, throwing up its jets of refreshing waters, and spreading itself like a fan, falling in showers resembling frosted silver, into a jasper basin of the softest and most delicate green, round whose top was carved a wreath of con-

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volvuli—cooling the surrounding atmosphere, and keeping in their pristine loveliness flowers beautiful and more fragrant than gales wafted from spicy Arabia, growing in quaint and antique vases around its brim—formed a picture of taste, luxury, and splendor, meet for the bright divinity who inhabited it.

The resplendent beauty of Mariamne, now in the zenith of her charms, suited well this gorgeous apartment. Tall and graceful, her form was the perfection of loveliness and youthful womanhood. Beneath the clear, dark skin, soft and pure as an infant's, flowed life's crimson current, leaving upon the cheek a color like that of a rose seen beneath the limpid waters; her redundant hair, black and glossy as polished ebony, was gathered up and fastened in a Grecian knot, by jewelled bodkins, at the back of her small and beautifully-shaped head; her forehead was broad and high, her eyebrows thin, dark, and slightly arched, while the large, liquid, and almond-shaped eyes, shone in their clear depths from beneath the violet-veined and thickly-curtained lids, like the starry midnight of her own native skies; her nose was slightly aquiline; her mouth small and exquisitely formed, and when the full, coral lips were parted, they disclosed teeth regular, and white as the pearl hidden within the rosy

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sea-shell. The beauty of Mariamne was of that high and intellectual character which belonged to her lofty race; and in her expressive countenance, spirit and determination were strongly blended with a winning sweetness. She was habited in a robe of white silk, with a broad, golden border, worked in arabesque; over this was a short tunic, or caftan of gauze, made very full, and sprinkled all over with golden stars, the sleeves being looped with amethysts, and fastened on the shoulders by jewelled butterflies; her slender waist was encircled by a girdle, embroidered in precious stones, clasped in front by a coiled serpent, the tongue a cleft ruby, the eyes emeralds; a necklace of large oriental pearls, with ear-rings and bracelets of diamonds, emeralds, and sapphires, completed her attire. Such was the appearance of Herod's youthful queen; yet, spite of her exceeding loveliness, and the grandeur by which she was surrounded, it was evident that her mind was ill at ease, and upon her beautiful features sat an expression of irritation and unhappiness.

The gorgeous sunset was fast fading away, and the deeply-dyed heavens had assumed a faint, purplish hue, while upon the edge of the horizon still lingered a broad amber line, just touched by a streak of pale lilac and crimson. The lengthened shadows heralded the

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coming darkness, when up rose the moon with its one bright attendant star, to light to their wild and unholy revels the promiscuous multitude which thronged the streets of Jerusalem.

At this moment, a loud, deep roar, broke upon the hushed stillness of the night, penetrating to the remotest parts of the palace, even to the room where Mariamne was sitting with her mother.

"Hark!" said she, springing from the couch, and going to the window, "they are carrying more beasts to the hippodrome for to-morrow's spectacle. God of my fathers! that Jerusalem should be polluted by scenes like these!"

"Ay," said Alexandra, who was only a shade less lovely than her daughter, "and thousands of our own people, who in their hearts abhor such innovations, in order to find favor with Herod and the Romans, will be there to witness and applaud those Gentile games."

"I feel," said the queen, "as if the name of Jew were now but a term of reproach, so much have we degenerated from our ancient dignity and splendor. During the life of our great and good ancestor, John Hyrcanus, our nation flourished and was respected, not only by her allies, but by foreign countries. When he ended his life, the holy theocracy died with him.

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Ambition was the ruling passion of his son and successor, Aristobulus, and it usurped the place of religion. He put a diadem upon his brow and changed the government into a kingdom. His son, Alexander, did worse, for he set himself up for a king, instead of a priest; and behold to what the variance, strifes, and ambition of his two sons, (albeit one of them was your father and my grandfather,) have reduced us. No longer a free people, the yoke of the tyrant is upon our necks, nor dare we lift a finger but at the bidding of the Roman. Our ancient customs are nearly abrogated, or so mixed up with those of the Gentiles as to be scarcely recognised. A *stranger*, and of *their* choosing, wields the sceptre of Judea; a man of mean extraction and low birth, an alien, and a usurper, who has waded to the throne, (the rightful heritage of another,) through the blood of our nearest kindred"

A smile of ineffable disdain passed over her features as she added: "And to this homicide, this blood-stained tyrant, have I been compelled, by the timidity and ambition of my family, but principally, my mother, through thy instrumentality, to give my hand—to promise love where there was nothing but dislike. No! each day, as it makes me better acquainted with Herod, but adds to my repugnance;

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and the more I am brought in contact with his coarse, violent, and selfish nature, the more profound is my contempt and aversion."

"Hush," said Alexandra, "walls have sometimes ears, and Herod is not to be offended with impunity."

"I know it," replied the queen, "and for that reason, notwithstanding his vaunted love, I never feel that my life is safe."

"Nay! not so; the king loves thee passionately, and would not, for his diadem, harm one bright hair upon thy head; jealous, I admit he is, and sometimes violent, but ask thine own heart if these moods are not frequently caused by thy haughty and imperious conduct?"

"It may be so, I cannot tell; but to fawn and flatter, and pretend affection, where there is only dislike and disgust—impossible!"

"It is a hard task, doubtless, for one so little accustomed to restraint, so impetuous and self-willed, to curb her feelings, and regulate her deportment to suit her circumstances—but remember, that even for *thee*, Herod's forbearance may not last forever."

"And pray, wilt thou tell me in what consists this mighty forbearance, of which thou art pleased so frequently to speak? He has not, certainly, as yet,

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cut off my head, nor put me to the torture, though in his fits of jealous fury he has frequently threatened to do both, and as they are his favorite pastimes, I should not wonder if one of these days he were to put his threats in execution."

"Nor should I, unless thou art more careful not to rouse, by thy ill-timed complaints, and cold and contumelious carriage, all the tiger in his nature."

"He has no right to expect from me a different treatment; to possess this poor person, which happened, unfortunately, to captivate his fancy, he was content to take to his arms a cold and most unwilling bride, whose whole heart and soul he well knew were given to another; to gratify his selfish passion, he did not hesitate to sacrifice the happiness of the woman he pretended to love—to tear her from the betrothed of her youth, and then, in a fit of jealous madness, banish her lover to a foreign land. No! admitting I loved not another, I could never love Herod. Our tastes, our sympathies, our very natures, are as far apart as are the poles, and while listening to his professions, I feel myself degraded by their expression; his love lives only in the senses, appealing neither to the imagination nor the heart. It is wholly and intensely sensual and selfish—is utterly devoid of

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sentiment—and a stranger to that sweet, self-sacrificing spirit which is the distinguishing mark of true, deep, heartfelt affection."

"Thy prejudices make thee unjust; feeling no love for thy husband, thou seest all his faults, but none of his virtues; would it not be wiser and more for thy comfort to cast a veil, as far as may be, over the former, and magnify, instead of depreciating, the latter?"

"The power of self-deception must be stronger than any I possess, that can set Herod's virtues in any kind of relief against his vices; and the veil thick and close to hide the hideous deformity of his mind and heart. No! my mother, no! I have sacrificed myself and my happiness to the ambitious views of my family, but that thou shouldst consider it within the range of possibilities, that I could ever regard Herod with feelings of favor and affection, is, I own, most wonderful; but since thou dost, I again repeat, I loathe and detest him, and the folds of a serpent could scarcely inflict a keener pang than do his caresses."

"Perverse, obstinate and daring woman! thou wilt never rest until thou hast tired the king's patience to the utmost, and brought not only thine own head, but the heads of all connected with thee, to the block."

"I care not," replied Mariamne, passionately: "and

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were it not for these," clasping her children wildly to her heart, "Herod might do his worst."

"*Queen of Judea*, calm thyself," replied her cold, selfish, calculating mother; "go lave thy burning cheek and swollen eyes in yon cool fountain; the hour approaches for the king's visit; let him not find thee thus disturbed. Why waste thy energies and mar thy happiness in struggling against the inevitable? But I go to conciliate, if possible, Cypros and Salome: by thy haughty and disdainful carriage, thou hast made those women thine enemies; the king entertains a great affection for them both,—judge then if they who have his ear at all times, are likely to spare thee whom they hate; if thou desirest their calumnies to fall harmless, receive thy husband to-night with at least an appearance of cordiality Farewell! and when to-morrow we meet, let me find thou hast profited by my advice."

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CHAPTER II.

Gentile Sports in a Jewish City.

The morrow's dawn was ushered in by all the tumult and confusion incident to so vast a multitude as were brought together within the walls of Jerusalem, to witness the coming shows. Herod had made proclamation to the neighboring countries, and called men together from every nation to be spectators of these games. The wrestlers, also, and others who strove for the prizes, were invited out of every land both by the hopes of the rewards to be bestowed, and by the glory of victory to be gained. The king had also made great preparations of wild beasts, and such other animals as were of uncommon strength, or were rarely to be seen. These were prepared either to fight with one another or with criminals.

Herod had built at Jerusalem a theatre, and also a vast amphitheatre in the plain. The latter was of immense extent, being three thousand feet in length and fifteen hundred wide. It was built of sparkling white stone, and adorned with much beautiful sculp-

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ture. In its extremity, and on each side, ran an ascent, or kind of terrace, reaching nearly to the top of the building, covered with seats and benches; the lower rows, thickly cushioned, were reserved for princes, nobles, and other distinguished persons; the farther end of the amphitheatre was occupied by stables for horses, and dens for wild beasts. To protect the spectators from the heat, the hippodrome was covered by an immense *velarium.* It was a curtain, or veil of blue silk, spangled with silver stars, drawn across the top and fastened to gilded beams. In the centre of the *valarium* was the Roman eagle, holding in its beak and claws emblems of the trophies obtained by Cæsar in his victories. The wrestling matches, chariot races, gladiatorial combats, and fights of wild beasts, were exhibited in the amphitheatre, on account of its great size; it being computed that more than a hundred and fifty thousand spectators could be contained within its walls.

The theatre in the city of Jerusalem was of much smaller dimensions, and rarely used except for the representations of plays, thymelici, or music meetings.

The games occupied five days. Those only in which the Athlete or wrestlers were engaged, and the chariot races, will be noticed. A description of the

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combats of the gladiators, or the fights of the wild beasts with each other, or with unfortunate criminals, are too revolting in their barbarism and cruelty to occupy the author's pen, or find favor in an age which, under the benign influence of Christianity, can regard such scenes only with abhorrence.

Herod had omitted nothing to render these shows truly magnificent. Everything in foreign countries, no matter how costly, had been imitated. Inscriptions of the great actions of Cæsar, and trophies of those nations which he had conquered in his wars, and all made of the purest gold and silver, encompassed the theatre; nor was there anything that could subserve his design, which was not exposed to view in these games. Julia also, Cæsar's wife, as these exhibitions were in honor of her husband, sent from Rome all sorts of splendid and valuable furniture, with crimson, and blue, and purple hangings, to assist in decorating the building in which the shows were to take place.

And how did the Jew in heart, as well as name, look upon these Gentile sports and foreign practices, so diametrically opposed to ancient customs?—With the most undisguised wrath and abhorrence. And so great was the indignation excited by this corrupting

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of their religion, and revolting from the laws of their country, that ten of the principal citizens formed a conspiracy to destroy Herod, as he entered the theatre; but this design was frustrated by one of his spies, who discovered the whole matter, and gave information to the king, who, with the most wanton cruelty, had these unfortunate men seized and put in prison, to be thrown to the wild beasts at the ensuing games.

There was yet another class of Jews, men of a mean and degenerate spirit, who, from fear or policy, identified themselves almost entirely with the Romans, neglecting, in a great measure, the public observances of the temple and their religious duties, and forgetting, under their new masters, the homage they owed to their Creator. By them the approaching festivities were beheld, either with reckless indifference, or pleased expectation.

The games about to be solemnized, had been in progress many weeks, and the notes of preparation were sounded far and wide. As the wrestlers strove naked, the women, by an ancient law, were not permitted to be present; but at all the rest of the games the *fairer* part of creation formed no inconsiderable portion of the spectators.

The hall or audience chamber in Herod's palace

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was an immense apartment, superbly decorated with gold, and sculpture, and precious stones, and purple, white, and crimson hangings; the entrance to it was by doors, made of the olive wood, highly polished and beautifully carved, that folded back in many leaves, upon broad golden hinges. At the extremity, upon a raised platform, covered with scarlet cloth, deeply fringed with gold, was a throne of ivory studded with sparkling gems. On either side of the throne was a brazen lion, and the gorgeous canopy was supported by the Roman eagle.

Sumptuously arrayed, the royal diadem upon his head, and the jewelled sceptre in his hand, Herod stood upon the steps of his throne. By his side was the queen, pale, cold, and beautiful as a Phydian statue, and on a lower step were his young children, lovely enough to have served as models for a sculptor.

On the king's right hand were his mother, Cyprus, and his sister Salome, and his brother Pharpras; at the queen's right were Alexandra and her brother Aristobulus, a beautiful youth of seventeen; the last male, with the exception of his grandfather Hyrcanus, of the royal line of Asamonica, and rightful heir to the crown of Judea. Herod, a few days previously, had conferred upon him the dignity of High Priest,

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HERODᵒ

KING OF IUDEA.

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hoping, by so doing, to make him forget the greater one, of which he had so unjustly deprived him.

The hall was filled by a crowded assemblage of distinguished persons from all parts, come to be witnesses of the games; and, attired as they were in the most splendid garments, presented a very grand and imposing spectacle. Herod graciously received their tendered homage, and as they bent the knee before him, touched each one with his golden sceptre, in token of kindness and good will.

He was a tall and stately-looking man, with a bold and handsome countenance, a noble and dignified carriage, and eyes blue and sparkling, but their general expression was too sinister to render them pleasing; his chin was round, small, and rather effeminate, his hair, light and curling, was powdered with gold dust; the whole character of his face partook more of the Roman than the Jew, yet around the well-shaped and firmly set mouth, might be traced the resolvedness of purpose, which, whether for good or evil, once formed, was never abandoned. In his appearance there was nothing that denoted the real ferocity and cruelty of his nature; and like Nero, when his evil passions were at rest, his expression was mild and gentle.

It was a glorious morning in the month of May

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which ushered in these games, and lighted myriads to their sports. It broke upon Jerusalem in all the resplendent beauty of an eastern climate.

The whole glowing orient was tinged with a deep crimson, rose, and golden hue, as the sun emerged from behind the mountains; and the dew, as it exhaled, formed itself into a thin vapory mist, which gradually floated upwards, and hung over the earth like a transparent veil, while the rays of the risen orb fell on the tall pinnacles and snowy temple of Mount Moriah, now lone and deserted as a forsaken bride The sea-breeze still continued to blow: and in many a shady nook, the dew drops lay like sparkling gems upon leaf and flower. The fields and gardens in and about Jerusalem looked fresh and green, and Nature seemed to have put on her holiday garb, in honor of the approaching festival.

The hour for the commencement of the games was at hand, and the road from the city to the plain was filled with chariots, gilded cars, steeds—whose housings of cloth of gold swept the ground—and a whole army of pedestrians.

Herod alighted from an ivory chariot, drawn by six milk-white horses, and entered the hippodrome amidst the sound of trumpets, clarions, and cymbals. It was

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crowded to suffocation, and as the dense multitude rose and greeted his appearance with loud acclamations, and the cry of "Long live King Herod, the friend and ally of Cæsar," the sound was like the roaring and rushing of the mighty ocean. A passage was cleared, and he passed on with his guards and attendants to his accustomed place, and seating himself for a moment beneath the royal canopy, smiled triumphantly, as looking round he beheld the sea of faces all turned towards him as the central point. Rising, he stood forward so as to be seen by the whole assembled people, and bowed graciously around in acknowledgment of their loyalty.

Order was now enforced as the games were about to commence; and the number of the judges being complete, the name and country of each champion was registered; and then a herald proclaimed, in the name of Cæsar, emperor of Rome and master of the world, that the games were opened. All eyes were immediately turned towards the portico from whence issued the wrestlers. There were eight: a Syrian, a Lybian, two Romans, two from Corinth, one from Athens, and one from Thebes. These men were the handsomest and finest representatives of their respective countries, and each looked as if he might claim the olive or palm of victory.

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With the exception of two, all were of illustrious families, for it was deemed a high honor to contend in the Olympic games; and the simple wreath of wild olive, palm, or laurel, which crowned the victor's brow, was beheld with more veneration than the jeweled diadem of kings.

After receiving the applause of the spectators, the attendant slaves brought flasks of perfumed oil, and, having well rubbed their bodies, sprinkled the wrestlers with a fine sparkling sand, for the oil made their skins slippery, and rendered it difficult for them to take hold of each other; the inconvenience was therefore remedied in the above manner. The ballots were marked, and then cast into an urn; the champions advanced—each drew one ballot, and gave it into the hands of the president of the games, who opened them singly, and paired them agreeably to their respective numbers or letters—the president then called out the two A, or ones, as it might be, and the strife commenced, and at each victory or defeat, thunders of applause or murmurs of disapprobation shook the building. Three only were crowned, the others being so equally matched, that though, after a brief resting space, they several times began again the combat, so little advantage was gained, as made it impossible to pronounce either party victorious.

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The three successful champions, after having each received the crown and palm branch which they carried in their right hands, were conducted around the hippodrome by a herald, preceded by a trumpet, making known their names and country; a coffer of gold was presented, which they distributed amongst the slaves and lower order of citizens; they then disappeared through the portico amidst the shouts and acclamations of the spectators.

The shows were over for the day, and the vast concourse returned to Jerusalem to spend the evening in merry-making, and to speculate and make wagers upon the chariot races of the morrow.

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CHAPTER III.

Gentile Sports in a Jewish City—The Chariot Race.

The chariot races were the most renowned of all the shows, and from whence most honor redounded to the victors. That it was so, is not to be wondered at, when it is remembered, that kings, princes, and generals of armies, always fought in chariots; it was therefore very necessary that the charioteers should be expert in driving and guiding their horses, as the success of the battle very much depended upon their address, and it was only to persons of the first consideration that this office was confided.

The high rank of persons who made use of chariots ennobled an exercisebelonging exclusively to them; hence, at the games, even kings did not disdain to compete for the Olympic palm, and conceived the olive wreath of victory which bound their brows added new splendor to a throne.

To the more humane games of Greece, Herod had

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added those more cruel and bloody practised at Rome. The people, though they piqued themselves upon their *politeness* and *refinement*, beheld with the utmost delight, not only the combats of the gladiators, where men murdered each other in cold blood, but the fights of wild beasts together, or with unhappy criminals, who were torn piecemeal by the ravenous and infuriated animals, their quivering flesh strewn over the arena, and their warm blood not unfrequently sprinkling the spectators. It was a remnant of their ancient barbarism, and the sight of blood, and the cries of the wounded and dying, instead of inspiring them with horror, seemed to be congenial to the ferocity of their nature, and to give additional zest to their sports.

In these tastes, Herod was not a whit behind his allies and *masters;* and in introducing games so obnoxious, he did no violence to his own feelings; though he greatly offended the prejudices of the people over whom he reigned.

At an early hour of the second day, the amphitheatre was crowded with a dense audience, and in every part of the building where a foothold could be obtained, people were seen clinging to the beams and ornaments.

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The king, who prided himself upon his skill and dexterity in all manly exercises, had determined to be himself a competitor in the chariot race. His antagonists were the king of Arabia, the prince of Parthia, and a noble youth, Alcansor by name, from Alexandria, in Egypt. The decorations of the preceding day had all been removed, and others far more splendid substituted; so that the entire hippodrome was one blaze of gold, silver, and everything most rare and precious.

The queen and her children, magnificently attired, sat upon an ivory throne, canopied by cloth of gold: standing near, were her guards and attendants: and upon a lower form, sat her own and her husband's family surrounded by the court.

Dispersed throughout the amphitheatre, were beautiful women, sparkling in jewels, laughing, flirting, and betting upon the race with the young patricians, who cooled the air around them with fans made of peacocks' feathers, and of the green and golden pheasant of Egypt.

Presently was heard the rumbling of chariot wheels, and the prancing and pawing of steeds, as if impatient for the race. Then came the blast of trumpets—the four gates of the *carceres* were flung open, and the

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competitors appeared, who were received with boundless enthusiasm. Many of the noble dames threw into the arena bouquets, of the rarest and most beautiful flowers, confined by valuable gems; attached to each bunch of flowers was a small bow of ribbon, of the same color as the livery of the charioteers; it was therefore easily known for whom they were intended; and as the young slaves picked them up, and laid them upon the top of the *spena* or wall, the competitors rose from their seats, and acknowledged the favor by a slight but graceful inclination of the body.

The places from which the chariots started, were regulated by lot, which had some influence in deciding the victory; for as they had to turn the boundary, the chariot on the left was nearer than those on the right; they were to run seven times round the hippodrome, and he who came in first, at the seventh round, was the victor. It required great skill in turning this boundary, for if the charioteer drove too near, he was in danger of being overturned; and if he kept too far from it, his nearest antagonist might pass between and gain a foremost position.

The ballots were now drawn, the names of the competitors proclaimed, together with the places they were to occupy. *Fortune*, or some *fairy* equally kind,

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had assigned the station on the left, nearest the boundary, to Herod, king of Judea. His dress consisted of a purple tunic, confined by a crimson belt embroidered with gold; his hair and beard were plentifully sprinkled with gold dust, and a jeweled tiara rested upon his forehead; his coursers the wild steeds of the mountains, "fleet as the simoon before which they had so often fled," and trained to the most perfect obedience, were yoked to a car of ivory and gold. Herod became his royal trappings right well, for he was a handsome man, and withal a vain one; and though a brave warrior, had a puerile delight in the adornment of his person.

Next came Procorus, prince of Parthia, young, gallant, and handsome. His long, fair hair, highly perfumed, floated in loose curls upon his shoulders; around his throat was a collar of emeralds; and his green symar, worked with silver stars, was girded about his waist, by a broad band interwoven with precious stones; attached to a car of green and gold, were four milk-white steeds of Thrace, light, fleet, and held by silken reins.

Third on the list was the king of Arabia. Fastened into his snowy turban by a magnificent chrysolite, was a bird of Paradise; his robe of camel's hair was

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confined by a scarlet belt, wrought in silver to represent the signs of the Zodiac; attached to his chariot, were four beautiful and spirited horses from his native land.

Lastly came Alcansor, the swarthy Egyptian, to whom fate had assigned the fourth and least advantageous place. To his bronzed car, shaped like the chariot of the sun, was yoked a magnificent team of coal-black horses, bred in Assyria. Tall, and slight, the figure of Alcansor was that of a youthful Apollo: and his features, of the Jewish cast, were noble and regular. Low down upon his brows he wore a turban of yellow silk, in which shone, with a clear, pure lustre, an opal of the largest size; his tunic, of the same bright hue, was clasped by a belt wrought in hieroglyphics. As he entered the lists, his eye was directed round the hippodrome, and rested for one brief moment upon the space occupied by the queen and her party; then, quickly withdrawn, he assumed his place with an air of careless indifference. Beckoning his confidential slave, he spoke to him in a low tone. The youth bowed, smiled, and going to the *spena*, gathered up the bunches of flowers knotted with yellow, and putting them in a basket, brought it to his master. The Egyptian regarded each bunch

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attentively, then with a look of disappointment consigned them again to his basket. At length he descried one, half hidden by its fellows—it was composed of lilies of the valley and the blossoms of the scarlet pomegranate. How well he knew those fragrant, and simple flowers! How often had he, in days gone by, woven them into a garland, to decorate the bright hair of her he loved!—time, place, all were forgotten in their contemplation. Memory had carried him back to the fountains of Jericho—to its grove of palms, and to the beautiful being who wandered beneath their shadow, or reposed by the murmuring waters at his side. The young slave touched his master's arm, and held up the reins. Alcansor started, pressed the unconscious flowers passionately to his lips, and placed them in his belt; then seizing the reins, the trumpet sounded, the chain which formed a barrier in front of the horses dropped, and away they sped, swift as the reindeer traversing the ice-bound deserts of Siberia.

Two rounds of the hippodrome were accomplished, and the chariots, with little variation, still ran side by side. At the third course, the Prince of Parthia, by a dexterous movement, slightly grazed the wheels of Herod's car; and while the king reined up for an

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instant to see if all were safe, he shot past him and took the station to the left. This manœuvre delighted the spectators, who testified their applause by clapping their hands, and waving little banners or flags, worked in all sorts of gay and brilliant colors. But Procorus was not long permitted to enjoy his triumph; even the appearance of a defeat Herod could not brook, for, as before observed, he was a vain, as well as a proud man, and those of his actions which seemed to be the noblest, were done for men's applause and to perpetuate his fame, not for their own intrinsic merit; the mere probability, therefore, of not being victorious, in the only one of the games in which he thought it not beneath his dignity to contend, caused him the severest mortification; especially as he had publicly vaunted his own skill in the exercise, and somewhat depreciated that of his antagonists: saying, "the king of Arabia was too cold and lethargic—the Parthian prince too young and volatile—and as for the Egyptian, though men spoke highly of his prowess, not only in arms, but in the exercise in which he was about to contend, he knew little about him, as he had kept himself entirely aloof since his arrival in Jerusalem."

He had a still deeper source of mortification, one

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that touched his feelings as well as his vanity, in the presence of Mariamne—that she (above all others) whom he loved with all the wild fervor of his impetuous and violent nature, should witness his defeat, and behold the crown he had internally appropriated to his own brows, encircling those of another, was not to be borne; these thoughts whirled through his brain with the rapidity of lightning, and in an instant his resolution was taken. To recover the distance he had lost in his present position was impossible; he of the green chariot kept close to the left, and about thirty paces in advance of the Arabian and Egyptian, who had taken advantage of the momentary pause made by Herod, and were a few yards before him; it would therefore have been attended with much hazard, admitting the space to have been greater than it was, to endeavor to pass between the teams, as his wheels might thus have been torn off, or his chariot thrown over. There was but one possible way of getting out of the difficulty, and this he instantly adopted; making a sudden turn, he partly rose from his seat, and inclining his body over the chariot, swept the lash of his long whip across the tips of his horses' ears. The gallant animals, obedient to the guiding reins, wheeled to the right, passed the Ara-

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bian and Egyptian, and presently left even the prince of Parthia far behind.

Loud plaudits shook the hippodrome at the successful performance of this feat, and Herod's proud lip curled, and his eyes flashed, as he glanced upward to where sat the queen, hoping to receive from her some sign of approval. But Mariamne saw him not, heeded him not; her look, wild and troubled, was following the car of the Egyptian, while ever and anon a convulsive shudder passed through her frame, and her bright cheek blanched to the hue of death.

Meanwhile the race continued, and with various changes. In making a desperate effort to pass his two antagonists, and, if possible, overtake Herod, Procorus's chariot swerved to the right; the wary Arabian measured the space; his car was small and strongly built, and his quick eye told him, with caution and dexterity, he might succeed in passing without injury to himself. A sudden and sharp cut of his whip—a few words of encouragement—his docile but fiery coursers gave a short, shrill neigh, and before the prince could right himself they had shot through the opening, nearly overturning, as they did so, his light and fanciful chariot.

Alcansor being the farthest from the boundary,

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had much the greatest distance to travel, yet he still maintained his place. Cool and composed, his manner evinced neither hurry nor excitement; yet the firmly compressed mouth, the sternly knitted brow, showed that the mere glory, or pastime, of disputing the prize in the chariot race, had little to do with his presence there. The sixth round had commenced: Herod, some twenty paces in advance, still kept thundering on; the eyes of the Egyptian pursued him, and their glance expressed both detestation and revenge. Presently he leaned forward, shaking the reins as he did so, and his horses, darting forward, seemed scarcely to touch the ground; the Parthian and Arabian were quickly passed, and the distance was rapidly becoming less and less between himself and the king of Judea. Herod hearing the near roll of wheels, turned to see which of his opponents was so close upon him, and his wrath kindled when he beheld the unknown and despised Egyptian. Lashing his horses, he kept them at the top of their speed; but though they did their duty gallantly, the "winged coursers" of him of the yellow tunic were shortening the distance between them; and spite of Herod's most strenuous efforts, before the sixth round was completed, Alcansor was by his side. And now came

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the "tug of war." On, on they went, still side by side, and so near together, there was scarcely a hand's breadth between the chariots; by degrees the space widened, Herod's panting and half-blown steeds slackened their pace, while those of his antagonist kept on their course, fresh as if just yoked to his car. The prospect of a defeat, when he had so confidently looked for victory, especially by one whom he had openly contemned, and in his heart considered in every respect so immeasurably his inferior, was too much for Herod's violent and excited temper. It roused all the evil passions of his nature—"the victor's crown should be his, if the lives of the unfortunate animals he drove paid the forfeit." With this *humane* resolve he rose in the car, and his whip left long lines of blood upon the smoking flanks of the nearly spent and straining horses. Mustering up, however, by a mighty effort, all the energy they still possessed, they darted forward and passed the Egyptian.

Then it was that the queen, whose frightened gaze was fixed on the dark charioteer, pale and trembling, hid her face in the folds of her veil; her senses seemed for a few moments to forsake her; a deathly sickness crept through her veins, and the noise and tumult

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around, sounded in her ears like the rushing and roaring of many waters; yet she did not faint, for in her intercourse with Herod, Mariamne had learned the secret of commanding not only her countenance, but her *feelings*. Inhaling from a pungent and aromatic liquid, contained in a crystal flask at her girdle, she resumed her usual appearance, before the malicious eyes of either Cypros or Salome detected her agitation.

At this tide of fortune the acclamations of the spectators redoubled, and "the crown and the palm of victory for Herod!" was shouted throughout the hippodrome. Yet the king was not deceived; he knew that his horses, urged and goaded beyond their strength, had made their final effort, and on that day, at least, no victor's crown would deck his brows. Darker and darker grew his visage as these thoughts agitated his mind, while the race still continued, but at fearful odds: his jaded and lagging horses, with their bits covered with foam and blood, and scarcely able to keep their legs, were passed with scarcely an effort; and as his despised and now hated rival flew past, he cast upon him a look of mingled scorn and defiance, which was returned by a mocking smile and a glance of disdain. A flourish of the whip—a slight shake of the reins—and Alcansor had accomplished the

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seventh and last round of the hippodrome. His superb team, shining and black as night, stood uninjured; their glossy coats without a stain, save here and there flaked by a few white spots.

Lightly the young conqueror sprang from his car, and throwing the lines to the attendant slaves, stroked and patted the faithful animals who had borne him so gallantly to the wished for goal. The ease with which Alcansor had distanced every competitor, together with the grace and dexterity he evinced in the management of his horses, and his perfect acquaintance with the exercise, excited the astonishment and enthusiasm of the beholders; and the facile multitude, who a few moments before had lauded Herod to the skies, now left him to his fate, while they exalted his successful opponent into little less than a god. Public opinion! what cared the Egyptian for it!—to him it was worse than nothing—a bubble, a vapor, a straw, which veered around, and was blown away by every breath of the changing multitude. No, he had passed through its ordeal and found it unjust, unmerciful, cruel, and he now turned from it with disdain; the object for which he had striven—hoped—thirsted—was accomplished, and he was content to appear in the eyes of all but *one* as a foreigner and a Gentile—

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if to her, love had not already revealed him, he trusted the expedient he had devised would make him fully known.

That the present moment of public triumph over his bitterest enemy was some slight compensation for blighted prospects, and wounded peace, who, that has any knowledge of human nature, can doubt? To be the winner at a chariot race may appear a trifling matter; but when it is remembered that the victor in this game was considered scarcely inferior to a conqueror, the satisfaction felt by Alcansor, actuated as he was by a variety of contending feelings, is not surprising.

A prey to the most violent as well as the meanest passions, Herod's mortification was intolerable; and could he have done it, he would rather have parted with the half of his kingdom, than stand where he then was, a gazing stock for the gibes and sneers of the eager and excited multitude. But the Egyptian had not done with him: he had yet another drop to add to his bitter cup of mortification.

A chaplet of gold and precious gems, wrought with the most exquisite skill, the fashioning of which the king had *himself* superintended—mentally appropriating, as he did so, the brilliant toy to the adorning

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of his own brows, was, after his name and country had been proclaimed, placed upon Alcansor's head. After the shouts and acclamations of the spectators had somewhat subsided, the same youth who had collected the flowers entered, bearing a long, slender pole, upon the top of which was fastened a light basket of golden net-work. Alcansor removed from his brows the circlet, and putting it into the basket, received from the slave the pole. He then proceeded to that part of the amphitheatre where sat the queen, and dropping upon one knee, bent his head as if in homage, then rising and elevating the basket, he gently laid its contents at her feet. Intense curiosity had kept the spectators profoundly silent, during this novel spectacle; but no sooner was the victorious crown deposited, than murmurs of approval and delight echoed throughout the hippodrome.

The second day's sports were ended; but when men looked for the hero of the day to pay him the accustomed honors, he was nowhere to be found—the end for which he came there was attained, and thenceforward he was seen no more.

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CHAPTER IV.

The Meeting.

In order to have a just appreciation of the illustrious personage whose eventful life forms the subject of this romance, especial reference should be had to the times in which she lived, and the domestic influences and examples, living and traditionary, by which she was surrounded.

To give a detailed account of the characters and actions of the Queen of Judea's ancestors, would be both tiresome and irrelevant. Suffice it to say, that the family of Maccabees, or Asmonia—from which she sprang—after the death of John Hyrcanus, was disturbed by continual dissensions, occasioned by the criminal and ambitious designs of its members. Brother rose against brother, children against their parents, and the most frightful crimes were committed, in order to place the courted diadem upon the brow of the guilty aspirant.

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The intestine commotion which ended in a civil war between the two brothers, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, wrought the slavery and ruin of the Jewish nation. They appealed to the Romans, made them umpires in their disputes, and Pompey settled their differences by despoiling and conquering their country, making its miserable inhabitants slaves, and their kings and princes tributaries to the Roman commonwealth.

Alexander, the son of Aristobulus, and father of Mariamne, a prince of great promise, fell under the jealous suspicions of Pompey, and was slain by his order. Alexander had married his cousin Alexandra, the daughter of Hyrcanus, a very beautiful woman, but artful, selfish, and inordinately ambitious. She had hoped to ascend the throne of Judea, and reign jointly with her husband; but his death rendering that impossible, after a few months of mourning she turned her attention to secure the high priesthood and royal crown for her son, Aristobulus, a beautiful youth, scarcely in the prime of adolescence. Her mind was so constantly occupied with forming projects to this end, that she bestowed little time or attention upon her young and lovely daughter, Mariamne, who she did not foresee would one day be elevated to

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the throne she so eagerly coveted. Ambition had seized upon her heart and was turning it to stone; and whatever of feeling or affection was not absorbed in this passion, was bestowed upon her son, with whom she confidently looked forward to share the throne of Judea at some future day. In the meanwhile the education of the young princess was not neglected. She shared with her brother—of whom she was passionately fond—in the lessons of his preceptor, a learned, but arrogant and self-righteous Pharisee, who imbued her mind with ancient lore, and thoroughly instructed her in the ceremonials of their religion; but of true and fervent piety, the religion of the heart, the knowledge that obedience is better than sacrifice, a contrite spirit than all burnt-offerings, she knew nothing. This was not part of the Rabbi's teaching; how should it be, when it was a doctrine of which he himself was wholly ignorant? The graceful art of embroidery she learned from her mother's handmaidens. Music was a gift and passion of her nature, and when her voice rose in one rich gush of melody, as she accompanied herself upon the harp, or dulcimer, cold must have been the heart which those heavenly strains would not have melted into tenderness, or calmed into peace.

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There was also in the manners and deportment of the young Jewess a witchery and fascination which few could resist. To these accomplishments were added a frank, loving, and noble nature, which only wanted proper culture to bear that good fruit, without which the most brilliant acquirements are in a manner valueless. Her sentiments were upright and elevated, and, fortunately for herself and those around her, her impulses—for like all imaginative and poetic temperaments, she was exceedingly impulsive—were generally on the right side. Petted and spoiled by all, save her mother and the Rabbi, her temper, which had never been curbed, was hasty and passionate, though not revengeful or implacable. As she advanced towards womanhood, her innate delicacy and sense of propriety, and her horror of everything ignoble, corrected in a great measure this fault, or at least its indulgence. Shocked and disgusted at witnessing the ebullitions of temper in others, she began to consider how they must appear in herself.

At this period, religion and morals amongst the Jews were at the lowest ebb. The Pharisees, by far the largest and most influential religious sect, were noted for their licentiousness, hypocrisy, and voluptuousness. Crimes were committed with impunity; and vice and

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immorality stalked abroad unquestioned. Such were the influences, public and private, by which the Jewish princess was surrounded, when, at the age of fifteen, she was compelled—to gratify her mother's insatiable ambition—to wed a man for whom she entertained not a particle of affection. It will not be matter of surprise, therefore, that there should exist little sympathy between them, and that she should exhibit little forbearance for his vices, his follies, and his crimes. Her virtues were her own, her faults those of education and the times she lived in. In the midst of a corrupt and licentious court, her conduct was marked by prudence and modesty; and though the vilest aspersions were cast upon her by Herod's relatives, few credited the slanderous tale. Frank, generous, and open, she disdained to affect what she did not feel, and the natural elevation of her character scorned all deceit. Thus, her very virtues were the source of much of her unhappiness; and day by day her most innocent pleasures and purest enjoyments were compressed into a narrow compass. Had she been endowed with the heartless selfishness, and cold, calculating duplicity of the princess Alexandra, her mother, her life might have, perhaps, flowed on in a calm, untroubled stream. But alas! for

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Mariamne, she had neither the faith which beareth all things, and hopeth all things, nor yet the worldly wisdom which would have taught her to conceal her feelings, as her features, with a veil.

The games were ended, the visitors had departed, and Jerusalem, in appearance at least, returned to its wonted tranquillity.

Night's lengthening shadow was fast spreading over the earth, and closing in upon a wild and tempestuous day; and as the moon came up, her wan and watery light was partially obscured by driving clouds.

The queen rose from her couch, where grief and anxiety had confined her since the memorable chariot race; and, approaching the window, put aside the clustering vines and looked out upon the night. The rain had ceased, but upon every odoriferous shrub and flower the drops hung like gems in a king's coronal. An irresistible desire to go forth and wander in that pale light seized upon Mariamne! The scene was in unison with her feelings, and she felt, moreover, as if the oppression at her heart would be less in the free air, and under the canopy of heaven, than immured in Herod's gilded palace. Calling softly to an attendant, (for the queen did not wish the eunuch, who had the charge of the household, and was in an

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outer chamber, to hear her voice,) a young damsel appeared.

"Rachel," said the queen, "bring me a wrapping-dress and thick sandals. I have a mind to walk through the citron grove to the fountain of the lake; and do thou, maiden, 'tire thyself and come with me."

Rachel remonstrated upon the imprudence of rising from a sick bed and going into the night air; but with an impatience wholly unusual, particularly when speaking to this, her favorite attendant, the queen bade her cease prating and be gone.

Rachel sighed deeply as she left the room, and as the sigh fell upon her ear, Mariamne's heart smote her for her harshness to the affectionate and unoffending girl. "I shall alienate even this humble and attached friend by my petulance," said she, bitterly; "how am I changed! I scarcely know myself. Where is that consideration and tenderness for others, which once would have prevented the word or act that could wound their feelings? Alas! alas! grief and anxiety, and constant irritation—the crushing and withering atmosphere in which I live—have nearly blighted the good seed once springing up within my heart; and I am in danger of becoming as overbearing and tyrannical as those by whom I am surrounded.

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Rachel, my poor child," putting her arm affectionately about the neck of the girl, as she entered, and kissing her, "thou wilt forgive my hasty speech, for thou knowest I have much just now to distress and perplex me."

"My gracious mistress," replied the damsel, falling on her knees, and covering the queen's hands with kisses and tears, "could I by the sacrifice of my life avert the sorrows and dangers that surround thee, how willingly would I lay it down in thy service!"

"I know it, maiden, and so much the greater reason for restraining my peevish temper; but rise, and dry thy tears—and see, the dark clouds have passed away from the face of the moon, the pale stars are coming out, one by one, in the deep blue vault; and the nightingale is singing his love-song to his favorite rose: let us away; and see thou lockest the door after us, to prevent intrusion."

Closely muffled, and leaning upon the arm of Rachel, Mariamne pursued her way through the porticos, upon whose curiously carved pillars the moon was shining in all her splendor, and thence into the courts, fresh and green, which led to groves of magnificent trees, cut into long walks, interspersed with deep canals and fountains, and brazen statues. Silently and

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thoughtfully the queen walked, for she was pondering deeply the events of the last few days, and what might be their issue. Herod, according to his wont when anything displeased him, was, she heard, more fierce and violent than ever; and she shuddered when she thought of the probable consequence of Alcansor's being discovered. "But why need I fear?" said she, mentally, "he is far away, long ere this, and out of the tyrant's power; yet Herod's vengeance is dark and deadly, pursuing its object to the uttermost corner of the earth—and when was it known to spare?"

A slight rustling among the trees interrupted her meditations, and for a moment startled her. She stopped and listened, but the sound was not repeated, and imagining it to have proceeded from some of the numerous birds or animals who were permitted to make their home in these delicious solitudes, she continued her way, and soon reached her favorite and most beautiful part of the grounds—The Fountain of the Lake.

Vapor, mist, and cloud, with one of those sudden transitions so common to Eastern climates, had entirely disappeared. As the moon's rays fell upon the lake, it lay one broad sheet of sparkling and liquid silver, save where disturbed by the falling and splashing of

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the fountain waters. The scene was full of a tranquil loveliness, and Mariamne felt its soothing influence upon her harassed and troubled spirit. Seating herself upon a rustic bench, she leaned her head on Rachel's shoulder, and wept long and quietly, until her perturbed and anxious feelings subsided into a languid and gentle calmness. Lifting up her face, she dried her eyes, saying, "These tears have done me good; and oh! maiden, could I but know that *he* were safe and far away, all other ills would appear light."

"Safe, but not far away," responded a voice, and in another instant the Egyptian was kneeling at her feet. "Beloved of my soul, my own Mariamne, thinkest thou I had risked so much to depart without one word, one look, or sign from thee?"

The queen neither screamed nor fainted, but her look, wild and troubled, was fixed upon her lover. She essayed to rise, but her trembling limbs refused their office, and, pale and exhausted, she sank again upon the seat.

"My love, my Mariamne, why this agitation?" taking her cold hand, and pressing it passionately to his heart and his lips; "Surely I have not taken thee by surprise, knowing I was in Jerusalem, thine heart must have whispered I would never leave it without

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seeking an interview. After years of separation and of suffering, thou wilt not drive the poor wanderer from thee without one word of welcome, of encouragement, or of hope."

"If I drivé thee from me, it is in mercy; did Herod but dream of thy being within his dominions, the dagger or the cup would shortly do its work, and men be never the wiser; imagine, then, for what a fate thou wouldst be reserved, wert thou discovered here!"

"Fear not for me: the king can have no suspicion that the victor in the chariot race was the man he has so deeply wronged. Every precaution has been taken —slaves, equipages, and all appertaining to me, were held in readiness and dispatched to Joppa, immediately after my leaving the hippodrome; a ship in waiting received them, and by this time ship and cargo are nearing the shores of Egypt."

The power of controlling her feelings, Mariamne possessed to a wonderful degree. It was partly natural, partly the result of circumstances. Resuming, therefore, all her firmness and self-possession, she looked the present steadily in the face, and saw its peril, but her heart quailed not. Alcansor had risked everything, even his life. for this meeting: it might, and

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probably would, be their last; there was much to say, and but a short time to say it in; measures must be taken to insure their safety while together, and then—an everlasting farewell! Laying her hand upon his arm, she pointed to a wilderness of trees:—

"Retire into that thicket—in a few moments I will be with thee." Then turning to her attendant, who stood trembling and affrighted by her side, "Rachel, my kind and good girl, I have never had cause to doubt thy entire devotion to my service; my playmate and companion in childhood; in womanhood, my sincere, though humble friend, affection removed the barrier which rank placed between us, and thy ready sympathy in grief or joy was always mine. The qualities for which I so much love and prize thee, together with thy *woman's wit*, are now about to be tried; see they fail thee not, and the gratitude of Mariamne shall not be told in cold and careless thanks. And now, maiden, hearken! and as thou valuest the lives of the two beings placed so entirely in thy power, heed my instructions. Thou knowest Hazael, every night at the third watch, unless the king is in my apartments, locks the door of the outer chamber, and also of the courts—the keys, when he retires, are placed under his pillow. Thou must take them thence!

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Nay, start not, but attend, and thou wilt find the task will be easily accomplished. The eunuch never refuses the *wine cup:* fill him a large one, and of the best; drop into it two of the sleeping potions thou wilt find in the secret drawer of my cabinet; the soporific will presently take effect, and he will sleep soundly for several hours—then is *thy time;* do not forget to secure the doors of my private apartments, and remember, I am too *ill* to be disturbed. And now, maiden, away; the night wanes—do thine errand well, and be here again at the last hour of watch."

Rachel spoke not, but bowing her head, pressed the hands of her mistress between her own, and then turning into one of the long and shaded alleys, was soon lost amid the darkness.

The queen remained looking after her, endeavoring to collect her scattered thoughts. Her position was one of extreme peril, but her courage rose in proportion. "He has risked all, even life itself, for my sake," murmured she, "even so will I for his. Separated by fraud and intrigue, we are once more united, and though the sword of the executioner were suspended over my head by a single hair, yet would I not forego the mournful pleasure of a meeting like this!"

Thus soliloquizing, she entered the grove, and the

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next instant, supported by a fond embrace, her head rested upon the bosom of him who had been the lover of her youth.

"Lovely, and beloved! can this indeed be reality? Am I once more permitted to hold thee thus, to feel the throbbing of thy heart, the gentle pressure of thy hand? Oh, Mariamne, these few short, blissful moments, have repaid me years of suffering."

The queen raised her eyes, full of a mournful tenderness, to his face, as she answered, "And they will be followed by ages of anguish."

"Not so! we have met, and are mutually assured of each other's truth and fidelity; when seas again roll between us, how consoling will be this remembrance! besides, circumstances may change, a tyrant usurper is seldom permitted to live out his appointed time."

"True! but Herod bears a charmed life. How many attempts have been made upon it! and yet he escapes unharmed, and inflicts upon others the death intended for himself. He is doubtless an instrument in the hands of God—a scourge imposed upon the Jewish people for their wicked and idolatrous practices—their great and crying sins; but let us not waste the short and precious hours snatched from fate, discours-

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ing of him; it is of thyself I wish to hear; where hast thou been during these long years of banishment, and how is it I behold one of the royal race of Asmonia a Gentile in appearance, and a competitor in Gentile sports?"

"These questions, sweetest Mariamne, are easily, and, I trust, will be satisfactorily answered. You are not, perhaps, aware, that our last meeting was treacherously revealed to Herod, who, in his jealous and insane fury, ordered me, upon pain of death, to leave Jerusalem within twenty-four hours, and, at the end of three days, his kingdom. I obeyed to the letter, for I felt the same land could not contain us. Journeying into Egypt, I found at Alexandria a distant kinsman of my mother, a man of some influence, who, indignant at the treatment I had received, warmly espoused my interests. Through the united exertions of himself and friends, I was appointed to a post of considerable trust and responsibility in the army Cleopatra was sending for the invasion of Syria. In the campaign I acquitted myself so much to the satisfaction of my superior officers, that, in consequence of their representations, I was appointed by Cleopatra herself to the command of a large body of troops, with the title of General; since then, wealth

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and honors unsought have flowed in upon me, and the house of Alcansor is as well known in Alexandria as Herod's palace in Jerusalem. The king's proclamation, inviting foreigners not only to witness the sports he was about to celebrate, but contend in them, seemed to offer the opportunity I had so long desired, viz: that of meeting the spoiler of my peace face to face. I knew he intended to dispute the prize in the chariot race. Secretly, and with the aid of my kinsman, I perfected myself in the exercise, and when the appointed time arrived, stained my skin to its present color, assumed the Egyptian garb, and so complete was the transformation, that when I appeared before my own household, I was regarded as a stranger. Secure from detection, I felt my hour of vengeance was near, and exulted in the thought that the same stroke would rid me of a bitter enemy—Judea of a remorseless tyrant—and thee of an unworthy husband. But Providence (doubtless for some wise purpose) ordained it otherwise. So cautious was Herod in his movements, I had no opportunity of putting my design into execution until we had fairly distanced all competitors, and were running side by side; his horses were then so completely exhausted, I scorned to use my advantage against his life. I could not *murder* even him in

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cold blood, and contented myself with wresting from his grasp the victor's crown, to lay it at thy feet; but I bide my time, and trust that on the battle field, or in single combat, my sword will yet drink deeply of the traitor's blood."

"Thou wert ever noble, Zerah, and it would have been unlike thyself to have taken even an enemy at a disadvantage. Besides, dearest friend, I would rather Herod fell by any hand than thine."

"Is he kind to thee, Mariamne? I think I could forgive him much if assured of that."

"Kind! ay—when the mood takes him; but thwart him ever so little, and the dark blood and the evil nature appear. But of that I complain not; to me his hate is far preferable to his love."

"Wretch," muttered Zerah, between his closed teeth; "but art thou happy, my beloved? Surely thou hast many sources of enjoyment independent of him."

"Happy! oh, Zerah, how wrongfully hast thou read me! my whole future has been torn away, and yet I must go on—the waters of affliction have passed over me deeply and darkly, yet I must remain to float upon their surging waves, and thou canst ask if I am happy?"

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"Pardon me, dear one, it was a vain and selfish question, and conscience reproaches me for having put it; resigned thou mightest be, but happy—and so widely severed from the betrothed of thy youth—love whispers, impossible! But how fares it with thy mother? Does Alexandra stand as high in the favor of Herod as when she was bartering thy hand for the sceptre she was in hopes, from his fondness for thee, would be in a great measure transferred to her own?"

"Scarcely—my mother's ruling passion is ambition, or I had not been queen of Judea. Beautiful and feminine in appearance, her mind is, as thou well knowest, masculine and daring to excess; and not finding Herod as subservient as she anticipated, is constantly raising seditions and making disturbance, in consequence of which the king has lodged her in the palace, and surrounded her by a guard, ostensibly of honor, but who know and report her every movement."

"I learned as much; and how doth her haughty and imperious spirit brook such treatment?"

"In private she chafes and complains; in public she wears a smiling countenance, and assumes a confidential air towards the king."

"Thy mother, my Mariamne, was ever an artful

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and designing, as well as a cold and selfish woman. To gratify her thirst for power, she did not scruple to sever ties the most tender and sacred, and make thy loveliness pander to her ambition. It may seem an unholy office to warn a child against a parent, but I caution thee to beware of Alexandra. She is proud, restless, and ambitious. Disgusted with Herod's sway, and the sort of honorable captivity in which she is held, she is scheming for the restoration of her son; already has she written to Cleopatra, and that bad and avaricious woman has promised, upon the payment of a certain sum, to use all her influence with Antony to dispose of Herod, and bestow the crown upon Aristobulus; but have thou, my love, nothing to do with her treasons, for Herod's anger is terrible, his vengeance sure and fatal."

"True, most true, and yet thou art here—here where instant death would be the consequence of detection. Oh! Zerah, beloved Zerah, hasten from this fatal spot, and leave Jerusalem ere the morning's dawn."

"Canst thou depend upon the damsel that was with thee? If so, have no fears for me. Methinks her's was a familiar countenance, one I had often seen about the palace in Jericho."

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"Often, indeed—how is it thou hast forgotten Rachel, the handmaiden who so frequently carried love-tokens between thee and me? Thou askest if she is faithful?—as steel; and were harm intended, the perpetrators must first pass over her dead body to reach mine or thine; but how didst thou gain an entrance into these grounds, usually so well guarded?"

"By the power of gold, a temptation which few can resist. A small bag of the precious metal, with the promise of one much larger, if I were permitted to visit these gardens after dark for the space of a week, made the principal *Cerberus* my friend. This is the sixth night since the chariot race that I have lain hidden amongst these trees, awaiting with a beating heart some sign or token from thee, for I have felt assured, my Mariamne, that love like thine would penetrate every disguise."

"Thou wert right, dear Zerah; but, surrounded by danger, I never dreamed thou wouldst remain an instant after the closing of the second day's games in Jerusalem."

"And couldst thou deem me such a craven as to allow danger, however imminent, to scare me from a happiness I felt almost within my grasp?"

"But to think, Zerah, what those brief moments

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might have cost thee, makes me shudder; yet, I would not it had been otherwise. This meeting will be the one green spot in memory, the refreshing water in the arid desert. But yonder faint gray streak in the eastern heavens is the harbinger of separation, and I hear footsteps. Ah! it is Rachel come to say our time is spent, and we must linger no longer; and now, Zerah, farewell! let not the rising sun find thee in Jerusalem, and the God of our fathers be thy refuge and protection. Beyond the skies we shall meet again—on earth, never!"

Folding her in his arms, the whispered words of Zerah spoke of hope, and a brighter future. "Life of my life, give not way to this violent sorrow, thou shalt soon have intelligence of thy Zerah; his messengers are trusty and faithful, and well and secretly will they do his bidding."

"And now, maiden," turning to Rachel, "I confide to thy keeping the most precious of my treasures; be true to the charge, and thy dower shall make thee a fitting mate for the noblest in the land." Then placing the queen in Rachel's arms, and uttering a "God forever bless thee," he imprinted upon her pale forehead a fervent kiss, and was gone.

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SALOME.

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CHAPTER V.

Salome.

Herod sat within his chamber, but his brow was clouded, and his visage dark. Leaning upon the back of his chair was his sister, Salome—a handsome, but bold-looking woman, greatly resembling himself—upon whose features sat a smile of gratified and triumphant malice. She was carrying on a whispered conversation, and it was evident the king's uneasiness was owing, in part at least, to her communications.

In another part of the room was his mother, Cypros, embroidering a standard, surrounded by persons (with the exception of Joseph, husband to Salome, and her son-in-law) of inferior note.

"Thou wilt allow," said Salome, addressing Herod, "the proceeding was singular, to say the least, wholly unprecedented in the annals of any games witnessed before."

"Singular! Well, perhaps so; but is that any

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reason why thou shouldst attach mystery to it? The Egyptian probably wished to increase his popularity with the multitude, by paying homage to the queen."

"That can scarcely be," answered Salome, "as he left the hippodrome immediately after the *crown scene*, not even waiting to receive the coffer of gold, which I suppose he was too proud to take, and departed that same evening."

"How knowest thou he left Jerusalem that same evening?" asked the king. "It is true, I missed him from the succeeding day's sports, but cared not to inquire why."

"Being curious to know something of the stranger who deported himself so insultingly towards thee in the chariot race," replied Salome, "I sent my freedman, Alexis, to the inn where he sojourned, with orders to find out everything he could respecting him. The people of the inn were loud in his praise, saying they believed he was a prince in disguise, as he scattered his gold about so lavishly. They also expressed much sorrow and disappointment at his sudden departure, which happened immediately after the second day's games, with all his retinue. The multitude who thronged the inn in hopes to catch a glance of the successful champion, were making merry at *thy*

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expense," she maliciously added, "and if Alexis may be credited, would not have expressed any very deep sorrow if thou hadst been overtaken by one of those fatal accidents which sometimes occur during the race."

"Very likely," replied Herod, with the utmost indifference; "but thou wert speaking of the Egyptian, not of myself; hast thou anything more to say concerning him?"

"Only that I have strong suspicions he and the queen were known to each other before they met in the hippodrome," answered Salome.

"Salome," said the king, bending upon her the stern and searching gaze he knew so well how to assume, "I know thou hatest Mariamne with a bitter hatred—thou hast ever some malicious tale for my ear, some vile fabrication, which, when sifted, bears not upon its impudent face even the shadow of truth. Thou art envious of the queen's grace and beauty, jealous of her popularity, and of the love and admiration she never fails to excite. To sum up all, thou art a seditious, mischief-loving woman, delighting in strife and variance; thy whole time is employed in forming parties, not only in my family, but in the court, and in the city; thou canst not live peaceably with any whom thou imaginest to be the queen's

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friends, and thou art constantly endeavoring to poison my mind against her, and change my love into hatred as dire as thine own. But thou presumest too much upon my forbearance and affection, and I warn thee, if thou dost not leave such practices, I will banish thee from Jerusalem."

Salome still continued to lean upon the king's chair, and a smile of derision curled her lip at his speech; for though frequently threatened with banishment for her malpractices, the threat had never been enforced. The fact was, she had wormed herself so completely into Herod's confidence—made herself so necessary to him, that he could not very well do without her, though she caused him, in many ways, much trouble and uneasiness. She was a woman of ready wit, and of a bold, resolute, and determined character; but as unprincipled as she was clever. Neither oaths, vows, nor promises bound her, and they were as easily canceled as if written in sand. Several years older than the queen, she thought, from the extreme youth and girlish appearance of the latter, to exercise a sway great as she was accustomed to exert, not only towards her own family, but all who came within her sphere. Her disappointment, therefore, was proportionately severe, when, in that slight and fragile

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form, she discovered a spirit as indomitable as her own, and a determination to avoid everything like intimacy or familiarity. Compelled to wed a man she detested, not all Herod's love and indulgence—and he did love her with an intensity of passion rarely experienced, though in so doing self was his supreme object—could win from Mariamne any mark of attachment in return. Salome she treated with undisguised contempt and aversion; Cypros with a cool and insolent indifference; and as for Pheroros, she seldom deigned in any way to notice him. Descended from a long line of royal ancestors, the Jewish princess did not hesitate to taunt Herod's family with the meanness of their descent, and their vulgar and assuming manners. This caused incessant quarrels, and kept the palace a scene of anarchy and confusion; while the king was continually appealed to, by complaints from his mother and sister, of the pride and arrogance of his wife. For the first few months of his marriage, Herod acted the part of mediator between the contending factions, and endeavored to establish something like amity betwixt them. His efforts were, however, in a great measure, unsuccessful; and the standard of peace was no sooner reared, than it was pulled down and trampled under foot.

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These continued dissensions at length exhausted the king's patience; and upon one occasion, when a more than usual excitement prevailed, and words, as well as parties, ran high, Herod actually had the belligerent powers seized, and placed under a strict guard in their respective apartments. Towards his beloved Mariamne, however, he very soon relented, and went himself to release her; but to all his apologies and protestations she maintained a cold and disdainful silence, showing thereby, not only that she considered herself very much aggrieved, but her utter contempt of the king. Her lofty and independent spirit scorned everything like duplicity, and she did not attempt to conceal the aversion she felt. This conduct not only mortified Herod's vanity, but wounded his affection, and irritated him still more against the queen; and though he could not overcome his excessive passion, which amounted to a species of frenzy, he was induced to listen more readily to the falsehoods and calumnies raised against her by Salome; and that artful and dissembling woman, perpetually on the watch, found in Mariamne's perfect frankness and plain speaking, subjects of continued complaint.

It was her envious and malicious temper which induced her, if possible, to excite in the king's mind

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suspicion of Mariamne and the Egyptian. She could not endure this public homage paid to beauty and goodness, in the person of her detested sister-in-law. Unprincipled and licentious herself, she had little confidence in the virtue and integrity of others. Coming, therefore, from behind Herod's chair, she seated herself upon his footstool, and, looking up into his face, her countenance assumed an expression of mournful and submissive tenderness, as she said :

"The pang inflicted upon a true and loving heart by misdoubtings and unjust reproaches, were hard to tell ; and hadst thou ever seen anything in me, but a fond and affectionate sister, devoted entirely to thy interests, I should not so much wonder at thy present anger."

"Thou art ever plausible, Salome," said the king, relaxing from his severity, and with a half smile ; "and I do believe thou really hast an affection for me, and wouldest not willingly hear me calumniated ; but I would, my sister, thou couldst live more amicably with the queen ; the disagreements which are constantly taking place disturb me greatly."

"And are not these disagreements occasioned by my unwillingness to hear thee evil spoken of?" replied Salome. "Thou knowest the queen loves thee

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not, and that she does not attempt to conceal her aversion; nay, the very servants, catching their mistress's humor, assume the right of abusing thee; and it was only yesterday I heard her favorite handmaiden, Rachel, call thee a hard-hearted tyrant; saying that thou hadst marred all the queen's prospects to gratify thine own selfishness, and caused her to live a most unhappy life."

"Said she so?" exclaimed the king, sharply, and with great excitement, while his contracted brow and flushed cheek gave evidence of the passion which moved him. "If this woman's tongue cease not its idle prating, I will pluck it out, and throw it to the dogs."

Salome had now, by her fabrications and insinuations, so completely wrought upon the fury and jealous temper of Herod, that she knew the calumnies she had breathed into his ear would only injure the queen, without endangering herself. Assuming, therefore, a mocking smile, calculated to irritate the king still more, she asked, if he knew that Mariamne had taken his discomfiture in the chariot race so to heart, that her grief had thrown her into a fit of illness which confined her to her apartments, where no one but Alexandra and her attendant, Rachel, were allowed to enter.

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"Ill, saidst thou, and caused by my discomfiture?" exclaimed Herod, sternly, "thou art either jesting or endeavoring to impose upon me. But mark me, Salome," and his eye flashed with rage and hate, "I will have this matter thoroughly sifted; and if I catch this accursed Egyptian within my dominions, his swarthy carcass shall return to its own country a head shorter."

"And thou wilt do wisely," returned Salome, "for assure thyself the queen and this Alcansor are not strangers to each other. When or where they have met, my ingenuity has not yet been able to discover; but that they have done so, Mariamne's excessive agitation at the Egyptian's approach, and his lover-like manner, are, to my mind, convincing proofs."

The *amiable* Salome now rose, pretending she had somewhat to say to Joseph. She had infused into the mind of her brother the poison of suspicion, and roused the demon of jealousy—and she left them to do their work.

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CHAPTER VI.

Herod and Mariamne.

The queen was seated on a couch in her summer parlor; the embroidery upon which she had been engaged was cast aside; her hands were clasped upon her lap, her face expressed weariness and disgust, while her large, melancholy eyes, were fixed with a look of mingled pity and contempt upon Herod, who, with a countenance distorted by passion, was striding up and down the apartment.

Pausing at length before the queen, he said, in a loud and angry voice:

"Art thou still resolved to maintain the same obstinate silence regarding the Egyptian? or wilt thou now explain who he is, and how thou camest to be *honored* by his notice; for that thou and he are not strangers, I am well advised."

"Thou appearest to be ignorant of one thing, at least," replied Mariamne, fixing upon him a look full

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of scorn, "that when I deem the question asked impertinent, I am equally impervious to threats as to entreaties."

"Well," said Herod, in a voice of forced calmness, while the glitter and tiger-like expression of his eyes would have daunted a less fearless spirit than the queen's—"perhaps thou canst divine why thou wert singled out in preference to all the other noble dames as the particular object of his insolent gallantry; an intuitive knowledge was doubtless vouchsafed thee for the purpose."

"There may be different readings of the word 'insolent,'" replied Mariamne, with a disdainful laugh, "and one would think a simple act of courtesy would scarcely require explanation; but as it is so, I certainly can have no objection to impart my own surmises. First, then, the queen of Judea being, in the eyes of the multitude, the noblest, greatest, most beautiful, and, in consequence, the *happiest* person present, vanity, if no other feeling, would have induced him whom men call Alcansor, to select her as the proper and most conspicuous object of his homage. Add to the foregoing, that this high-born and envied dame was the wife of the great Herod, who, by some fortuitous and unforeseen event was defeated in the

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chariot race, by said unknown and despised Egyptian; —that this Egyptian, in the kindliness of his heart, commiserated the disappointment and mortification of his competitor, and conceived that as the vanquished hero could not have the glittering bauble—which had cost him so much thought and time in the planning —placed upon his own brows, the next best and most pleasing circumstance to him, would be to see it grace those of his queen. Such is my reading of an act, simple and respectful in itself, but which seems to have cost thee much thought and anxiety."

So saying, and without the slightest appearance of discomposure, she resumed the work upon which she had been engaged—the ornamenting a part of the high priest's dress for her brother Aristobulus.

Brave and intrepid himself, Herod could not but admire those qualities so fearlessly displayed in the slight and graceful form before him. She looked so beautiful, too, as she bent over her embroidery frame, with her eyes cast down, and the long, dark lashes resting upon her bright cheek, that he felt his anger melting away beneath the influence of so much loveliness. "Did she but love me," thought he, "could I by any art win her to look favorably upon me, and return in some degree my passionate fondness, I would

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willingly for so great a bliss sacrifice the half of my kingdom; but to me she is ever the same—cold as the snow upon her native mountains. Fool, fool! to take the casket, when I knew the gem it enclosed was given to another; yet so wildly do I love her, that, even deprived of that, I cannot give her up."

Wondering at his silence, when she expected threats and reproaches, Mariamne looked up, and beheld the eyes of the king fixed upon her with an expression of more softness and refinement than they usually wore, while a deep sigh escaped him. Advancing to the couch, he seated himself beside her, and passing his arm round her waist, attempted to draw her towards him, saying as he did so:

"Lay that soft cheek but for one moment against mine, dearest and most beloved of women, and say that Herod is not hated, and all shall be forgiven."

The queen, who always shrank from her husband's caresses, withdrew herself from his embrace, and unwilling to irritate him farther, took refuge in silence. But Herod had marked her repugnance, and starting up, exclaimed:

"And thus it is ever; when I would wrap thee in the folds of my heart, and bury every unkind remembrance in its most secret chambers, thy coldness and

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aversion curdle and freeze the very life-blood which flows so warmly around it. Oh! cruel and obdurate woman, thus to condemn me to the endless torment of an unrequited passion!"

"It is of thine own seeking," replied Mariamne, "and while commiserating the fate thine own headstrong passion has brought upon thee, thou appearest to have forgotten the misery its selfish gratification has entailed upon two innocent and unoffending beings."

"There is no danger of thy ever allowing me to forget the one *great mistake* of my life," replied Herod, "and I could almost wish I had never seen thy beautiful and bewildering face."

"Then why not consent to a separation, and receive in return my eternal gratitude?" said Mariamne.

"That thou mayest hunt out thy minion," answered the king, "and take him to the heart from which I am banished! I would slay that man who dared to come between me and the meanest object of my desire. Bethink thee, then, whether it were safe to lavish upon another the love which thy obduracy withholds from thy husband and king."

The pale rose upon Mariamne's cheek deepened into crimson at these words; her eyes dilated, and her

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whole frame trembled with emotion. But with the effort of a strong will she calmed down her outraged feelings, while she answered with great temper:

"Thou art mistaken; I would not wed Zerah, were I divorced from thee to-morrow."

"And why not?" asked the king. "It is plain from thy whole conduct that, though long years have passed since your separation, he still retains the first place in thy affections."

"Because," responded Mariamne, with a disdainful smile at the unworthy motive imputed to her, "the bare suggestion is an insult to every feeling of womanly delicacy. Once the wife of Herod, thinkest thou that I could so degrade my sex as to wed another? Let me but be freed from this cruel bondage—from the iron which is entering my soul and wearing out my life—and the joy and solace of my future will be drawn from the memory of the past. That lives like the blessed sunlight in my heart. It is a beam from heaven, pure and holy, which no earth-born joy can ever darken."

Herod looked down and pondered, and then said: "If such be thy determination, I see not why thou should'st so anxiously desire a separation."

"Perhaps not," said Mariamne. "Between thy

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feelings and mine there is no sympathy. Thou livest for sensual and present enjoyment; I, upon the hallowed and sanctified bliss of the past, from which no forced and repulsive ties can withdraw me. Think, then, how cruel the yoke of a life wedded to one man, while my whole soul is given to another."

"This is too much," said Herod, starting up, "dost thou not fear I shall slay thee, after such a confession?"

"No," replied Mariamne, "for by so doing thou wouldst inflict upon thyself at least a short-lived pain; and though not told in so many words, (I mean since my fatal marriage,) it is a fact thou hast ever been aware of."

"And now do thou listen," said the king, "and treasure up what I say in thy heart of hearts, for sooner or later it shall come to pass. I will have spies in every part of the world—will move heaven and earth but I will find out where this impostor, this traitor, has hid himself; and when discovered, he shall be torn limb from limb, and his vile carcase given as food for the fowls of the air."

"He fears thee not," replied the queen, turning very pale, "and the God whom he serves, and thou contemnest, will protect him from thy wicked arts."

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"We shall see," said Herod; "and in the mean time, keep within the palace walls; for I strongly suspect thee, and believe this Alcansor to be at no great distance—and remember, the *heads* of thy guard shall answer for thy obedience."

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CHAPTER VII.

Plotting.

As before observed, Herod, at the repeated and united entreaties of Mariamne, his wife, and Alexandra, her mother, had deposed Ananelus, and bestowed the high priesthood upon Aristobulus, a youth scarcely seventeen years old, and to whom it belonged in right of succession. This pleased the generality of the people, and satisfied for a time his mother, so that peace was once more restored in the family of Herod.

But Alexandra, who was not only a woman of unconquerable spirit and determination, but of great ambition, did not allow the calm long to continue; for, knowing her son had as good a right to the kingdom as to the high priesthood, she could not bear that he should be deprived of either. By her he was grandson to Hyrcanus, and by Alexander, his father, he was grandson to Aristobulus, and therefore had the interest and right of both those brothers centering in him. By

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his descent from the latter he had the high priesthood —that going in the male line—but by his descent from both, he claimed the crown; and Alexandra having succeeded, by intriguing with Cleopatra, in gaining the one, resolved to pursue the same means in hopes of accomplishing the other. For this purpose she wrote to the Egyptian queen, laying before her the claims of her son, and beseeching her to use all her influence with Antony, in order to the obtaining his rightful inheritance.

Herod, who ever felt as if his throne were tottering beneath him, was constantly upon the watch to detect conspiracies; and suspecting this correspondence, was not long in ferreting it out. Enraged at the trouble and danger Alexandra was constantly bringing upon him by her restless and daring spirit, he confined her to the palace, setting spies to observe her every movement, so that nothing she did escaped their observation.

This treatment, so derogatory to her rank and illustrious birth, roused the indignation of Alexandra to the highest pitch; and she resolved to use every means to make her escape into Egypt with her son, whither Cleopatra had invited her.

In this undertaking, she hoped to find in the queen

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an ally and assistant; for, disagreeing on almost every other point, they were united in a common hatred of Herod, and love of Aristobulus. Neither, she was well assured, would Mariamne object to laying aside a crown which had been forced upon her, and had only proved one of thorns; especially when resigned in favor of this beloved brother. The fertile and scheming brain of Alexandra thought over, devised, and rejected many plans of escape; until at length one presented itself, which, from its singularity, appeared more feasible, and less liable to detection than the rest; and while waiting for the daily visit of the queen and her brother—for Herod would not even permit her to go to their apartments—she employed herself in thinking over and maturing her plots.

Some time before the occurrence of the events related above, Dillius, a friend of Antony, had visited Herod's court, and being much struck with the surprising beauty of Aristobulus and Mariamne, advised Alexandra to have their pictures drawn, and sent to the triumvir, assuring her that Antony's admiration would be so great that he would be unable to deny her anything she might choose to ask.

Now Alexandra knew this Dillius was both unprincipled and wicked, and that he intended no good to

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either herself or children by this advice. Nevertheless, she did as he desired, and dispatched the pictures by him, thinking her compliance might, at some future time, serve her own purposes, without taking into consideration the shame it would be apt, from Antony's lawless passions, to entail upon her children.

The recollection of this event now crossed her mind, and so unscrupulous was she, as to the means resorted to in obtaining her ends, that she reflected with the utmost complacency upon the possibility of again using her daughter as the stepping-stone to her abominable ambition. Could Antony once see the beautiful original of the picture he so much admired, he might, for *her sake*, be induced to depose Herod, and place Aristobulus upon the throne of his ancestors; and then, taking the place of Cleopatra in the affections of the noble and licentious Roman, Mariamne might reign queen and mistress over the civilized world. Whilst she—still young and beautiful, and allied by the nearest ties of consanguinity to the two most beloved and highly favored by Antony—what might not be her destiny!

Such were the thoughts which floated through the teeming brain of this wicked and ambitious woman; plainly showing, that in the accomplishment of her

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ends, whether lawful or unlawful, she never permitted an opposing obstacle to divert her from her purpose. Finding all her family cut off, by the force of circumstances, from the splendors of a throne, she pandered to the selfish passions of a man of low birth—a heathen in everything but the name—one who had usurped the inheritance of her father and her son, had aided and abetted the murder of her husband, and was totally repugnant to her daughter, who was betrothed, and her affections fixed inalienably upon another. To attain her ambitious ends, she had sacrificed the happiness of a life; and now, to further those ends, which had been in a great measure frustrated, she was again ready to wade through a sea of guilt and shame. But presumptuous and wilful sin is never allowed to prosper, even in this world, as we shall see hereafter.

Planning, plotting and meditating, the time slipped unconsciously by, and Alexandra was roused from her deep and absorbing reverie by the entrance of her children. She embraced them affectionately, and then entered at once upon the subject of which her mind was full. Addressing Aristobulus:

"Thou knowest, my son, we have originated many ways to escape from the tyranny of Herod, all of

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which have either failed or been attended by difficulties too great to be encountered. In my last letter from the Egyptian queen, she proposes that, accompanied by thee, I should fly to her, and promises to use all her influence to bend Antony to my wishes. A way of escape from the vile durance in which I am held, has presented itself to my mind, and if it meet thine and thy sister's approbation, shall be, as soon as arrangements can be made for that purpose, put into practice. My design is, to have made two coffins, as if for the purpose of carrying away two dead bodies; thou shalt take possession of one, and I of the other, and in this manner, after nightfall, we shall be carried by those servants whom I can trust, out of the palace, and to the sea-side, where a ship will be in readiness to bear us to the shores of Egypt—now, what thinkest thou of this stratagem? Is it not a good one, and more likely to succeed than any of the others?"

Aristobulus, whose spirits were buoyant with youth and health, was delighted with this contrivance of his mother's. Kept in an honorable seclusion by the jealousy of Herod—for he feared the good-will and affection of the people for this youthful and handsome scion of a noble stock—he longed for a wider sphere of action, and entered with enthusiasm into any scheme propo-

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sed, to rid himself and his mother—whom he tenderly loved—of the tyrannical supervision exercised over them by the king.

Not so with Mariamne: though equally anxious for the departure of her kinsfolk, and indignant at their treatment, she saw all the hazards to which they would be exposed in such an attempt; and endeavoured to dissuade them from it, but in vain: Alexandra telling her, that once safely arrived in Egypt, and Antony being made their friend, she did not despair of breaking the chains her daughter found so galling, and introducing her both to the court of Cleopatra, and that of Rome; while Aristobulus, whose affection for his sister was deep and fervent, embraced her fondly, bidding her be of good cheer, and that he would shortly, if Providence favored their present attempt, bring such an army to the gates of Jerusalem as would shake it to its foundation, expel the usurper from his throne, and release her from ties imposed and hateful.

The queen smiled sadly; and as she looked upon the beautiful and glowing countenance of her brother, so filled with high aspirings and youthful hope, a vague terror, an undefined presentiment of coming evil, of which he was the object, assailed her; and with tears she again urged the postponement, at least,

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of their rash enterprise. But entreaties were unavailing, and she was at length induced to accede to a step which both her reason and her judgment condemned.

Matters being now talked over amongst themselves, it was deemed expedient to call in the slaves of Alexandra, whom she considered the most faithful and attached, and who had received from her marks of kindness and consideration, and discover how far they were to be trusted. Alexandra undertook the task of catechising, assisted occasionally by the queen and her son: and when they had answered to her entire satisfaction, and taken an oath of secrecy, some ten or twelve were selected for the expedition, with the promise of a handsome reward, which, if successful, was to be doubled. To Esop, her own confidential servant, who was both active and intelligent, and warmly attached to his mistress, was entrusted the arranging of the whole affair, subject to the supervision of Alexandra and her son. The domestics were then dismissed, with strict injunctions to secrecy, and after having spent another half hour in talking over and speculating upon the anticipated event, the mother and her children separated for that day.

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CHAPTER VIII.

The Flight and the Capture.

The preparations for the flight of Alexandra and her son were concluded, and the morning had dawned whose evening, they hoped, would see them far away from Jerusalem and a tyrant's power. Everything had been conducted to the entire satisfaction of the parties concerned, and with the utmost quietness and secrecy. The two coffins, covered with a dark cloth, were brought in by a private entrance, and safely lodged in a vaulted chamber next to Alexandra's, and should they be surprised in being taken out, it would excite no astonishment, as in the enormous establishment maintained in Herod's palace, such events were of frequent occurrence.

Esop's family had lived for three generations in that of Asmonia; consequently, he felt himself completely identified with their interests, feelings and prejudices; and Alexandra herself could not look down with more

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supreme contempt upon the vulgar origin of the Idumean and his relations, than did her serving man, Esop. Besides this, he had a private grudge against Salome, who, knowing him to be in the confidence of Alexandra, never passed him without some malicious insinuation against that princess, which Esop took as a personal affront to himself, and never let slip an opportunity of retaliating. He worshipped his mistress, and loved her children—whom he had frequently carried in his arms—as his own. Supreme, then, was his contentment and delight at the success which had attended, thus far, his undertakings; and not the least of his satisfaction consisted in thinking of Herod's and Salome's fury when their flight should be discovered, and they see how completely they had been outwitted. But alas! for all human calculations—how often are the best arranged plans frustrated by the turning of a straw!

The advancing day found all things in readiness for flight, and with so much secrecy and quietness had the preparations been conducted, that in all the immense household not a suspicion had been excited as to what was going on, and even Salome's ill-natured vigilance was at fault.

The queen and her brother, and one or two of Alexandra's women, together with Rachel, were assembled

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in the apartments of the latter; and while the women worked at their embroidery, and conversed in low tones upon the approaching event, Alexandra and her children were speculating upon its probable success, and laying plans for a future, over which was cast so dark a veil.

A few more turns of the glass, and the golden sands will have run out their appointed time; and the fugitives will have left their stately prison-house, to seek protection and redress from one, if possible, more treacherous than Herod himself.

Alexandra was grave and thoughtful, but resolute and fearless; while Aristobulus, full of hope and anticipation, was whispering words of comfort and consolation in the ear of his beloved Mariamne, who, pale and sad, reclined weeping upon his shoulder.

The cool, gray twilight was fast losing itself in the shadowy darkness of night; and the stately trees, which so lately flung their lengthened and fantastic shadows upon the green slopes and sunny knolls of the courts, and beheld themselves mirrored in the clear depths of the lakes, were swiftly becoming a dark, sombre, and undistinguishable mass.

"The hour is near," said Alexandra, "the last sands are nearly run—another quarter, and Esop and his attendants will be here."

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"To put us alive into our coffins," said her son, half laughing, half shuddering. "Suppose my *kind* brother should, by some possible chance, discover this stratagem, and find out what the coffins contain, thinkest thou he would not pretend ignorance, and have them buried six feet under ground?"

"Art thou becoming craven as the time approaches, foolish boy?" angrily asked his mother. "If so, thou hadst better remain in the sort of honorable captivity in which the king's jealousy holds thee, and leave me to fly alone; but assure thyself, in such determination there will be no safety, and that Herod, ere long, will provide a coffin for thy dead body, as I do now for thy living."

"Thou mistakest me sadly, dearest mother. Did'st ever know me craven-hearted, since that day when, a child of but ten years old, I seized upon the crested snake that upreared itself from behind a tree, with full intent to bury its venomous fangs in the tender flesh of my poor sister, and dashed the monster with such force against the sharp edge of a stone tank, that its scaly body lay quivering and dismembered upon the ground."

"Pardon my suspicions, dear child; but when I heard thee lamenting, as it were, thy fate, in being

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obliged to enter a coffin alive, my mind involuntarily reverted to our degenerate relative, Antigonus, who, when Herod, with the assistance of the Romans, was besieging Jerusalem, instead of fighting valiantly for the preservation of his religion and his kingdom, fled at the hour of peril into the citadel, where he lay hid until the city was taken by storm; and then, finding concealment no longer possible, came down from thence, and falling at the feet of Sosius, the Roman general, petitioned in the most abject manner for his life. But the Roman despised him for his cowardice, and insulted him, and called him in derision *Antigone.* And for all his dastardly conduct, his life, as thou well knowest, was not spared, for Antony, at the instigation of Herod, and upon receiving from him a large sum of money, had thy weak and unfortunate uncle beheaded at Antioch. And such, if thou dost not manage to escape from his power, will be thy fate; for, notwithstanding his apparent kindness, Herod both hates and fears thee."

"In the God of our fathers will we put our trust," said the young high-priest, devoutly raising his eyes to heaven. "He is ever merciful and gracious towards them that fear Him. Our cause is a just one, and, unless for our sins, He will again restore the

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kingdom to its rightful inheritors, cleanse the temple from its pollutions, and permit its desecrated courts to be trod once more by faithful worshippers. My spirit burns for such a consummation; and what sufferings would I not willingly undergo for its realization! To see Hyrcanus, my venerable and aged grandsire, habited in his sacerdotal vestments, and ministering at that altar, from which he has been so unjustly expelled—to behold the royal crown once more upon his head—the golden sceptre in his hand—I should deem no sacrifice too great; but in the present posture of affairs, I fear those wishes are equally vain and futile."

"Entirely so," responded his mother. "Having been maimed by his wicked nephew, Antigonus, my father can never again exercise the office of high priest in Jerusalem, and his nature is too mild and gentle to govern a people so turbulent and seditious as have become the Jews. No, he is far better off, and happier where he is. A captive to the Parthians, through the treachery of Antigonus, their king has at length, won by his mild and peaceable demeanor, set him at liberty, treats him with the utmost kindness and respect, and has given him an habitation at Babylon,* where

* Not Babylon the Great.

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there are a great number of Jews, who honor him as their high priest and king. My greatest fear is, that through love of his country, he will be induced by his treacherous kinsman (who is constantly sending for him, and making the most magnificent promises, which he has no intention of fulfilling, but only holds out as a lure to get him in his power) to leave his place of safety and return to Jerusalem, where he can never have the same honors he is now enjoying. But in discoursing upon the misfortunes of our relations, do not let us forget that the time of our own departure is nigh at hand; and hark! there is Esop's voice"—and the next instant that important functionary entered, and with a countenance strongly expressive of satisfaction, informed his mistress that all things were in readiness, and her faithful servants only awaited her commands to begin their flight. "The bearers are within," he added, "all faithful, stout-hearted men, ready to peril life and limb in the service of their lawful prince: their dress and the darkness of the night will disguise to whom they belong. For the rest, we must boldly pass the palace guards, and trust in God for deliverance. Once outside the city gates, and we are safe. Mounted upon the fleetest horses, which are there held in readiness, we shall, ere daylight,

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reach the sea-side, and embarking on board the vessel, be entirely removed from all pursuit."

"Let us go at once, then," said Alexandra, "time presses. And now, my child," addressing the queen, "farewell, and GOD bless thee! We shall meet, I trust, ere long, under more auspicious circumstances; and remember this flight, if happily accomplished, will benefit thee as well as thy brother."

She then embraced her daughter with more affection than was her wont, for this mysterious and uncertain parting, and the knowledge that she left her to brave Herod's anger alone, when their flight should be discovered, called up all the feelings of a mother in her heart; and she wept bitterly, as, releasing her from her arms, she commended her to the care and kindness of Rachel.

Esop was now becoming restless and uneasy to be off. He hated leave-taking at any rate, as he said all the good it did was to make people cry and feel sad; he therefore, with tears in his own eyes, begged the queen "to make as short work of it as she could, and let them depart, assuring her they had not a moment to lose."

Mariamne did as he desired, and throwing her arms round her brother's neck, and imprinting upon his

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lips and cheek a sister's pure and holy kiss, entreated him "to be careful of himself for her sake," and then releasing him from her embrace, waved him a last adieu, and departed.

Relieved from the presence of her daughter, Alexandra wiped away her tears, and taking the arm of Aristobulus, followed Esop into the vaulted chamber; and here a scene presented itself that would have shaken nerves less firm than hers. Supported upon trestles stood the two coffins; while the bearers, wrapped in dark cloaks—the hoods covering their heads, and drawn over their faces in order to concealment—stood silent and erect, looking black and grim as if chiseled into their statue-like position by the hand of the sculptor. The lower end of the room, which was very large, lay in complete shadow; the wind howled dismally through the long, damp cloisters, and the deep red flame of the torches, swayed hither and thither by its noisome breath, cast a lurid and fiendish glare upon the stern and determined countenance of the attendants.

Alexandra looked around, her cheeks blanched, but the paleness was only momentary—hers was not a mind for visionary fears, and bidding Esop remove the lid of the coffin, which was perforated with holes, she

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sprang in, and the cover was carefully replaced. Aristobulus followed his mother's example, and every thing being ready, the procession moved onward, headed by Esop, bearing a torch.

Quietly, cautiously, and without interruption, they proceeded along the narrow cloisters, and as they entered upon one of the courts which led into the streets of the city, the torches were extinguished.

The guards, placed at these gates, gave them free egress, and without a question. This, for a moment, excited some surprise in Esop, knowing their usual inquisitiveness concerning all that happened within the palace; but his anxiety to get beyond their reach, prevented this circumstance from making a lasting impression upon his mind. With slow and steady step they traversed the long street that led to the eastern gate, outside of which, and some distance beyond the walls, was the common cemetery or burying ground. Here the two graves that were to receive the *empty* coffins were dug, and here, also, concealed in a grove of trees, were four fleet horses, which were to carry Alexandra, the young prince, Esop, and one other confidential attendant, safely—as they hoped—to the seaside; while the rest of the domestics were to return to the palace.

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The eastern gate was passed, and again without a question, and in less than half an hour, the procession entered the burying-ground. It approached the new-made graves, and Esop looked carefully around, but no object met his scrutinizing gaze in that shadowy resting-place—all was silent as the death they feigned.

"Lower the coffin, and let me out," said Aristobulus, "for I am well nigh stifled here; it may be a pleasant enough resting-place for a dead body," he added, shaking himself free from all incumbrances, "but for a living one, commend me to a fleet steed and a free saddle."

He then assisted his mother to her feet, and, giving the necessary directions to those who were left behind, the little party walked quickly to the grove, where they found the horses held by the attendants, and quietly nibbling the long grass. The night was dark, and looked tempestuous, and only here and there was seen a solitary star peering through the dense clouds, as they scudded along.

"The weather is in our favor," whispered Aristobulus; "should we meet any travellers, the darkness will prevent our being recognized; nevertheless, let us draw the hoods of our mantles well over our faces, then mount and away."

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This was accordingly done; and Alexandra, assisted by her son, was in the act of springing upon her horse, when a hand was laid upon her arm, and they were surrounded by an armed guard.

For an instant the dauntless spirit of Alexandra gave way beneath this unlooked-for misfortune, and hope seemed dead within her; but shaking off her despondency, she assumed all her native dignity, and demanded by whose authority a princess of the royal house of Asmonia was prevented from pursuing her journey?

"By that of one whose orders thou wilt scarcely dare dispute," replied Herod, coming forward. "Bold and refractory woman, can neither threats nor kindness keep that scheming and seditious temper of thine within bounds?"

"Thy present office of spy and jailor suits well with thy base origin," derisively answered Alexandra, not noticing his question; "but mark me, thou usurper of another's inheritance, lay but the weight of thy finger in wrath upon either mother or son, and thy head shall answer to Antony for the deed."

"Sayest thou so?" shouted Herod, in a rage; "then if thou art still bent on mischief, we will try

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what bolts and bars, a little wholesome discipline, and bread and water, can effect."

"Oh," responded Alexandra, mockingly, "thy threats in this instance, as in many another, are likely enough to evaporate in empty air; at all events, thou wilt find there is an *alchemy* that can *force* even bolts and bars." Thus, in mutual crimination, passed the time until their arrival at the palace, where the haughty and fearless princess, together with her son, was consigned under a strict guard to their apartments.

A few words will serve to disclose why so well-contrived a plot proved abortive. Esop (whose greatest fault was a love of *gossip*, and never, when in the full tide of talk, pausing to consider if what he were saying had or had not a mischievous tendency) met, the day previous to the proposed elopement, one Sabion, a friend of Alexandra's. Supposing from their intimacy that he was acquainted with her intention, he not only spoke of it freely, but entered into particulars, requesting his advice respecting several little matters of final arrangement. Now, this Sabion was an enemy of Herod's, because he was supposed to have been one of those who laid snares for, and gave poi-

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son to, Herod's father, Antipater; he therefore listened attentively to Esop's narration, and by his own comments and remarks cunningly drew him on, until he had divulged the whole affair. Having gathered all the information necessary for his purpose, he took his leave, and flattered himself that by turning informer, he should gain the good will of the king, and turn his hatred into kindness. Without one scruple, therefore, and in order to stand well with the higher power, he betrayed the woman whom that very day he had deemed it an honor to address as a friend. But his treachery and faithlessness were punished; for Esop, some time after, having learned to whom the failure of their undertaking was owing, lured him into the pleasure grounds surrounding that part of the palace appropriated to the women, and where it was not lawful for him to go, and in walking through an alley very thickly shaded with trees, plunged him into a deep pool which formed one of its ornaments, and there drowned him.

Herod, though filled with wrath at this new proof of Alexandra's treachery, suffered her to proceed in the execution of her project, and then, as has been related, surprising her in the very act. Notwith-

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standing he greatly desired, he durst not inflict upon her any signal punishment, fearing the interest of Cleopatra (who hated him) with Antony. Such being the nature of the case, events were suffered, for the present, to fall into their usual course. But Herod pondered all these things in his mind, and the fruit of his cogitations resulted in one of those dark deeds that so often stain the page of history.

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CHAPTER IX.

The Summer Palace.

It was deep in the summer—its last most fervid and glowing month. The tender green, so lately clothing tree and shrub, was exchanged for robes of a darker and richer dye. The delicious spring flowers had lived out their sweet and ephemeral lives, and others of more gorgeous hues had sprung up in their place. The vine-clad hills, rich in their purple clusters, waited to be gathered and make glad the heart of man, with their rosy juice; the waving and yellow grain, the staff of his life, for the curved sickle. Nature, in her magnificent abundance, uttered a language all understood, and men's minds were teeming with the pleasant anticipation of well-filled barns, overflowing presses, and piled-up granaries. Twelve moons had risen and set, and shed their mellow lustre over temple, tower, and palace, since the events narrated in the preceding chapter. Jerusalem was

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in a state of unusual repose, and the principal personages in Herod's household seemed, as if by mutual consent, to have laid aside some of their ancient animosity; but this calm, like that which rests upon the bosom of the ocean before a storm, served but to render the approaching tempest more fearful.

About twelve miles from Jerusalem, upon an eminence of considerable height, in a beautiful part of the country, agreeably diversified by hills and valleys, and wooded with a great variety of the finest trees, Herod had built a summer palace, and adorned it with everything which could please the eye or gratify the taste.

The building was of white and green spotted marble, and of the purest Corinthian order. Round the fluted pillars, which supported the different porticos, twined parasite plants, diffusing a delicious odor, and in vases of a picturesque shape bloomed the native and exquisite flowers of the soil, intermingled with rare and fragrant exotics. Nothing, in short, had been omitted to render this place an *earthly* paradise, and a fitting habitation for royalty. Groves and gardens, and birds of the most brilliant plumage and sweetest notes, statues, fountains, cascades, these were the decorations without: and within, gold and

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silver and jewels, and sculpture and paintings, and furniture of a most regal kind.

It was the custom of the queen to pass the hot months with her children at this luxurious habitation, for the benefit of a freer and purer air than could be had in Jerusalem, and here she was at this time surrounded by a large company.

Many of them, noble strangers from Rome and the adjacent parts, came either to assist in the approaching feast of tabernacles, or be present at the solemnities of the occasion. Among the most distinguished was the queen's brother, the young high priest, and bright eyes grew brighter, and the pale rose deepened on the cheek of beauty when he appeared, which was but seldom, for much of his time was spent in retirement, in meditation and prayer, in studying the laws and ceremonies of his religion, and in fitting himself to officiate worthily at that altar where he was so soon to minister. Not that Aristobulus was indifferent to the smile of beauty, or the marks of approbation which everywhere greeted him; or that his religion made him cold, morose, or gloomy—far from it; for as his person was the image and embodiment of love—so the soul, being made worthy of so fair a casket, was filled with the same divine essence. To

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him, indeed, love was a necessity—his heart was a well-spring of kindly affections, ready to pour itself out, and share in the joys and sorrows of all who asked its sympathy.

There was about him, both in the extreme beauty of his person, and the gentleness and purity of his manners, something almost unearthly, and though buoyant with youth and health, he was of a different mould from those around him, and seemed better fitted to wear a heavenly, than an earthly crown. And so *thought* Herod's jealous and malignant heart, as he marked his regal port, his royal bearing, the grace and dignity with which he trod those splendid halls, and the evident delight his presence afforded, not only to the Jew, but to the polite and luxurious Gentile. Mariamne's eyes, too, and Alexandra's, followed all his movements, the former with looks of tender affection, the latter with a haughty smile of gratified pride and fondness.

Did any of those various expressions of feeling escape the watchful and envious eyes of Herod? Not one; and in the tyrant's mind his young kinsman's doom was sealed. He had no pity for his youth, his beauty, his high lineage, his fine and noble qualities. The young prince stood in his way, and had seized,

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as if by right, the place in men's hearts which he desired—and he must be sacrificed; for Herod never permitted the most sacred relations, the most tender connections, to form a barrier between himself and his ambition. On, on, he plunged, ridding himself of every opposing obstacle, and wading through seas of blood to retain possession of that throne to which his conscience—for even Herod had a conscience, though he seldom let it be heard—told him he had no right. In all his dark designs and murderous resolves, he found a willing encourager, an able assistant, in his sister Salome. *She hunted the quarry*—Herod *disposed* of it. And for what did she do this?—for the love she bore her brother? Far from it; for she was one of those horrible human anomalies to whom wickedness seems more congenial than goodness—who would rather do a vicious act than a virtuous one, albeit the virtuous one would better answer the end. Her heart was naturally callous, cold, and selfish, and her evil passions had encased it in adamant. She would have conspired against her brother's life (which in after days she did) as readily as his bitterest enemy, could his death have furthered any of her schemes; but as that was a result for which she was not yet prepared, she wished to make it appear (and though a

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shrewd and sagacious man, to him it did so appear) that her motives were disinterested, that it was his interest, his safety, she had at heart, while in reality she was only plotting to keep herself as much in power, and others—who had a far better right—as much out of power, as she could.

Truly, there are many Salomes in the world, and many whose vanity, conceit, and self-love make them their dupes.

Joseph, Salome's husband, was also one of the guests at the Summer Palace. He was a Jew of considerable note, a man of wealth, intelligence, and education; he was, moreover, a very handsome man—a man of whom any woman might be proud—whom any woman might love. But Salome loved him not—nay, she hated him, and for the simple reason that he saw through her wicked designs and reproved her for them. He was also a friend of the queen's, and always took her part, particularly in Herod's presence, when his wife or any of her family set about finding fault or abusing her. This, in the eyes of his spouse, was an unpardonable offence, and as she was growing very tired of her matrimonial bonds, she set her wits to work to find out some way to get rid of them; for though the Jewish laws allowed a man, if his wife

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did not please him, to put her away, it did not extend the same privilege to the weaker vessel, either because woman, in her loving, confiding, clinging nature, is less apt to spy out defects than man, or if she does detect, is more willing to overlook them.

But to proceed—Joseph, as has been remarked, was a friend of the queen. He admired her frank and natural character, he looked with delight upon her surpassing beauty, and commiserated the trying situation in which adverse circumstances had placed her, and her evident unhappiness. Mariamne also entertained a warm friendship for Joseph, for in his strict integrity she knew she could place the utmost confidence.

"What an exquisite evening!" said Joseph, as he leaned against one of the fluted pillars of a portico; "and what a paradise is around us!—can aught in nature be more beautiful? And behold, mistress of this fair scene, what a prospect in the distance! There, to the south, lie a long range of Judah's mountains, purple with the evening sunlight; westward is the Mediterranean Sea, looking like a long line of blue and misty light, from whose tideless waters rises the freshening breeze which is now cooling thy glowing cheek, and invigorating thy languid frame. Further

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off, in the back ground, the eye rests upon the mountains of Samaria, while towards the east we see the valley of the Jordan, whose river is scarcely to be discovered, as it flows towards the Dead Sea, which lies mirrored between the undulating hills, reflecting on one side its few brown and stunted shrubs, on the other, its picturesque and rocky shores; and there to the south-east, behold our ancient city, our magnificent Jerusalem. Observe the tall pinnacles of the holy temple—are they not divine, with that rosy, almost crimson gleam upon them? And the gray and stately towers of Antonia, how subdued their coloring, bathed, as it were, in yon purple and golden cloud; but most beautiful of all is thine own palace home, a brilliantly tinted picture of snow in a frame of arabesque. Is it not a glorious prospect? and dost thou not experience somewhat of pride and gladness in thinking thou art its mistress and its queen?"

"No," said Mariamne, "circumstanced as I am, my only feeling is regret."

She paused, and a dreamy sort of forgetfulness passed over her countenance. Her thoughts were wandering back to those living fountains of her existence—those buried memories—"wrapped, as it were, in the winding sheet of the past," so painful,

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yet so sweet to recall, and which were so deeply engraven upon the tablets of her mind. Deep was her revery, profound her abstraction; the present was entirely forgotten—she was living in the past, young, happy, loving, and beloved—the fountains of Jericho, and its grove of palms, sole witnesses of *their* deep and intense happiness, fleeting as intense.

Joseph watched the variations of that speaking face; he knew her history, and his kind heart sympathized in her sorrow. Unfortunate in his own matrimonial connection, and being much in company with the king, he was the better qualified to judge of his entire unfitness to make the happiness of so highly principled and strongly feeling a woman as Mariamne, and he could not help wishing, for her sake, her wearisome bonds could be broken. With eyes which expressed the tenderest pity, and one hand resting on the balustrade, near her own, he was fast becoming like his fair companion, lost in his own reflections, when, emerging from a green alley, he beheld Salome, accompanied by Herod and several noble strangers from Rome.

Fully aware of her malicious disposition, and knowing her love for him to be much of the same nature as that she entertained for the Queen, he felt fearful

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she might make their present retirement (as it seemed, from the rest of the company, though it was merely accidental) a matter of calumny to the king. He therefore withdrew a few steps, and breaking off a branch of the clustering jessamine, seemed busily engaged in examining the flowers. But the eye of the basilisk is not more quick in discovering its prey, than was that of Salome in detecting the slightest circumstance she thought might be to the queen's disadvantage. Besides, here was a double inducement. Turning to Herod, (who was conversing eagerly and earnestly with one of his guests, apparently upon some very absorbing question, for he had not observed there were persons in the portico,) she said, with one of her sweetest and blandest smiles:

"How beautiful Mariamne looks, and how very handsome is Joseph; thinkest thou he will be as firm in resisting temptation as was his Hebrew namesake?"

Herod raised his eyes—there they stood—the one all unconscious of his presence, the other with a confused and guilty look, for fear often has the appearance of guilt. The fire of jealousy kindled in Herod's heart, and a dark red spot burned upon his cheek; but he controlled himself, and a look of anger was the only notice he deigned to take of Salome's insinu-

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ation. Nevertheless, it rankled deeply in his heart, and was not forgotten, and when he entered the portico, his manner towards Joseph was cold and repulsive, his voice stern and harsh.

Accustomed to his changeful moods, the queen heeded him not, but continued gazing on the prospect before her. She was not long permitted even this innocent enjoyment, for when the evil spirit was upon him, Herod seemed to take a fiendish pleasure in making others, especially those over whom he exercised, or endeavored to exercise, unlimited control, as uncomfortable as himself. Going towards Mariamne—

"I wish thou wouldst remember," said he, in a sharp, peevish tone, "thy place is among our many and illustrious guests, not in pleasuring a person of so little consequence as is our kinsman Joseph."

The proud and indignant blood mounted to the queen's face and neck, at this undeserved rebuke; even the tips of her slender fingers showed their sense of his harshness by a deeper rose tint; but she scorned to answer him, and, gathering the clustering blossoms that hung around her, began weaving them into a garland, singing the while in low, but very sweet tones, a plaintive song learned from a Hebrew captive.

"Dost thou not hear?" laying no gentle hand upon

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her arm. "I *command* thee to return to the chamber where are assembled the noble Roman ladies, and leave this folly," taking from her fingers the chaplet.

Mariamne moved not—spoke not—but the smile of quiet scorn, made up half of pity, half of contempt, was a sufficient answer. Stung to the quick by its expression, (for it certainly said, as plainly as smile could say, that she considered her husband as little better than a madman, and, therefore, scarcely responsible for his words or actions,) his anger, which had been gradually rising, now burst forth, and in language the most insulting, he demanded if she did not intend to obey his commands?

"Assuredly, when issued in language befitting thee to utter, and me to hear. Until then, as this is a lovely and a pleasant spot, and one in which I am fain to linger, I shall remain where I am. Thou hast been with thy sister, Salome, and from thy unseemly conduct, most probably listening to more of those hateful falsehoods with which she so frequently regales thine ear. Thinkest thou, a princess of the royal house of Asmonia will submit to be aspersed and calumniated by that wicked and unprincipled woman?"

"Thou art not over-choice in thy epithets. Out of respect for me, thou mightest be more circumspect in

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their selection when speaking of my sister; besides, how knowest thou we were conversing of thee? It is only a surmise, put forth to evade my commands."

"I am more concerned for their truth than their delicacy," answered the queen, "and if thou dost not respect thyself, thou canst scarcely demand respect from others; and I tell thee again, thy wishes must be conveyed in different language, if thou expectest Mariamne to heed them."

"Insolent and rebellious woman," exclaimed the king, "I could almost find it in my heart to slay thee for thy contumacy."

"Ay! but thou darest not; thou triest to forget, and make others forget; but I will remind thee, that thou art amenable to one more exalted in rank than thyself—at whose pleasure or caprice thou holdest thy present usurped dominions, and who, by a word, can tear the sceptre from thy grasp, and hurl thee back to that obscurity from which his venality has raised thee. Thou hast bartered gratitude, honor, and honesty, for a tottering throne; justice and equity for a rapacious lust of gold, which, like the horse-leech, is ever crying more, more, and which thou, with thy whole obnoxious race of publicans and tax-gatherers, can scarcely satisfy. Thou art detested by the whole Jewish people, not only

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for thy tyranny, but because thou art a stranger; hast usurped the place of their native princes, and art thyself under subjection to another; whereas, the Divinely appointed kings of Judah owed allegiance to no man—but to God alone."

The queen ceased, and the marble statue against which she leaned was scarcely less pale, as, with eyes fixed upon the king, she watched the effect of her speech.

Herod's aspect had gradually, as she proceeded, assumed that of a dull, dark, and breezeless day, whose present quietness portends an approaching storm. The murky rain clouds, the threatening lightning, the muttering thunder, now scarce seen and heard in the far distance, but anon rolling onward, nearer and nearer, each moment growing blacker, fiercer, and more terrible, until they burst in one fearful explosion upon the fertile fields, or stately city, exposed to their fury.

Thus it was with Herod's anger; outwardly calm, inwardly raging like a seething cauldron, and only waiting a fit opportunity to expend its fury upon her whose fearlessness had provoked it. But the time was not yet; his palace was filled with Cæsar's friends, one a near kinswoman of the empress Julia—who loved the queen of Judea and her brother, Aristobulus,

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and hated Herod. He was therefore obliged, for the present, to curb his anger, for Octavia was highly esteemed for her virtues and talents by Cæsar, and greatly beloved by the Empress, and he was fearful of doing anything which might be displeasing to her, knowing well her influence was great with the royal personages to whom she was allied. Nevertheless, like the couched tiger, his ferocious intent was only delayed, not abandoned; his victims were within his reach—one sweep of his royal *paw*, and the jaws of destruction would open to receive them. Surrounded by snares, escape was impossible. Unconscious of danger, their youth, beauty, and innocence, hurried on their fate, and ere they were aware of the evil that threatened them, the glittering fangs were buried deep in the quivering flesh.

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CHAPTER X.

Feast of Tabernacles.

The streets of Jerusalem were again all astir, filled with a mighty multitude, collected from every part, both far and near—assembled for a very different purpose from that which, eighteen months before, had thronged its gates and blocked up its highways.

It was the third great Jewish festival—the Feast of Tabernacles; one of the most ancient observances of that people, appointed by Jehovah, after he had brought his people out of Egypt, and kept by the children of Israel in commemoration of their dwelling in tabernacles or tents, during their forty years' sojourn in the wilderness. Seven days was the time allotted for this festival, the eighth was observed as one of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth, because at this season the whole harvest, not only of the corn, but also of the vintage, and other fruits for which they were to express their thankfulness to God at this feast,

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was completed. It was, therefore, a distinct festival, observed with extraordinary solemnity, and called the Feast of Ingathering.

The rich, full, dusky green of summer, with its depth of light and shade, was beginning to lose itself in the harmonious and picturesque tints of autumn. In place of their emerald hue, the trees were assuming a yellowish tint, the forerunner of that gorgeous coloring heralding decay and death. The hill-sides and fields had changed from green to hazel, and were dotted with wild flowers. The weather was exquisitely lovely, clear, and genial, not too hot, but warm enough to make the leafy tents—which not only environed the outer walls of the city, but were erected in the arched streets about the temple, in courts, on the flat roofs of the houses, and in gardens—pleasant dwelling-places for the thousands who came up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles.

The broad, full autumn moon rode high in the deep blue heavens, not white and lustreless, but with a clear golden light that paled from the vision the shimmering stars within her orbit. Nature was propitious, and as the people cut down branches of the palm, the citron, the myrtle, and the willow, and wove them into canopies, they sang, in the fullness of their hearts,

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praises to the Merciful and Beneficent Being they came to adore and to serve.

The temple solemnities had commenced. Each person, with a branch of palm and myrtle tied together with gold or silver cords, walked round the altar, singing Hosanna, or, *Save, we beseech Thee;* while the songs of the Levites, upon cymbals, psalteries. and harps, resounded throughout the sacred building, and fell in ravishing strains upon the ears of devout worshippers.

In an inner court, raised fifteen steps above the others, and conspicuous to the multitude, was the altar of sacrifice; and here, habited in his pontifical robes, stood Aristobulus, the young high priest, making atonement for the sins of the people. The ornaments of his dress were exceedingly splendid, and as the young man stood clothed therein, he looked so extremely handsome—there was so much of goodness, of grace, and dignity in his mien, and his countenance exhibited so much of that high family from whence he sprang, that the people burst out in joyful acclamations, testifying their admiration and affection in the most unreserved and open manner. They did not fail also to whisper that with the high priest's crown he should also have worn that of Judea; and

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many of them deplored, even with tears, that it should circle the head of an alien and a foreigner. It seemed, indeed, as if his presence, thus publicly amongst them, had revived all their feelings of loyalty and affection towards his family, and animosity against that of Herod—feelings which had only slumbered, never been extinguished.

Their expression was the funeral knell of this highly gifted but most unfortunate youth.

At the great festivals, and when such immense multitudes from every nation were congregated in and about Jerusalem, Herod never went up to the temple without a strong guard of Roman soldiers, as tumults at such times were not uncommon, and to quell them frequently required a military force. Besides this, he never felt himself safe in a crowd, the greater portion of which were Jews; for he knew their enmity, and he feared to trust them. Well might he fear! Was ever a tyrant usurper safe from the plots and machinations of a people cruelly oppressed and abused?

At this time, in consequence of the love and admiration which the appearance of Aristobulus excited, in his high and holy office, ministering at that altar, so lately profaned by the foot of a stranger, there was an unusual display of ill-feeling towards Herod. He

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marked it well, and the demon of jealousy was again roused against his young kinsman. Yes, there he stood, in appearance a god; so good, so beautiful did he seem, many eyes turned with a longing desire, many hearts with a yearning affection, towards him. It was too much. In *his* presence, Herod was despised, and in a measure forgotten; but the hour of retribution was nigh—he would teach them the folly and the danger of offending him by their expressions of sympathy and attachment to his hated rival!

Ay! look your last, well-meaning, but injudicious throng; your high priest's garments will shortly be exchanged for robes spotless as his own purity!

It was a proud, glad time for Alexandra, during the Feast of Tabernacles, clouded, it is true, by some regrets that her son was deprived of that higher station he was every way so well calculated to fill; but, brought so constantly before the people as he would henceforward be, she trusted a way would yet be opened for him to assume the government nefariously wrested from him. Alexandra was still a very beautiful woman, her deportment courteous and highly-polished, and where she wished to please, rarely failed of success. Her powers of fascination were now exerted upon high and low, Jew and Gentile—all were

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greeted with honeyed words and bland smiles. Her politics not only embraced the present, but looked into the dim and shadowy future. She spoke confidentially to some—in vague terms to others, of her son. She discoursed of his brilliant qualities, his virtues, his piety, his hatred of foreign innovation, and his devotion to the laws, manners, and customs of his own people. She enlarged upon the merits of the illustrious family from whence he sprang, their noble deeds, the benefits they had conferred, the privileges they had granted to the Jewish nation, and she ended by deploring that this family—one of the most ancient in Judea, from whose illustrious stock had risen so many kings—had now, by the cruelty of foreign influence, dwindled down to one ancient man, her own beloved father, in banishment and exile, and her son, who stood in the glory of his young manhood before them. Alexandra was wise and sagacious as well as beautiful; she perfectly understood that the surest way to enlist the sympathies of the Jews, and make them subservient to her views, was by recalling agreeable images of that past which they loved, contrasting it with the present which they hated, and flattering their prejudices and their pride.

As she conversed thus, she obtained the good-will

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and affection of the people, and they would willingly, could they have so done, deposed Herod upon the spot, and raised her son, the young high priest, in his place. Their hearts had flown back to their ancient princes, and they longed for the restoration of that honored line, when, instead of the murderous axe, the dagger, and the bowl, every man would dwell in safety under the shadow of his own vine and fig-tree. All classes seemed to have caught the infection, and longed for the rule of their rightful princes. They talked over the possibility of such an event. Dark designs, half-uttered sentences, hints of what might be done, could a man of energy, determination, and talent, be found willing to be their leader, were whispered about. They formed little knots, their passions were excited, there was wild and fierce gesticulation, they scowled from under their bent brows upon Herod, upon Salome, upon his mother and brothers; they shook with suppressed rage at the insolence of his Roman guard; and when a few of that guard came amongst them, and compelled them, with drawn swords, to disperse, it was with curses deep, not loud, that they obeyed.

But on the world's great theatre the scenes are ever changing; there is scarcely time to rejoice over an event, or deplore its unfortunate issue, ere another

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takes its place, and it is swept from the tablets of memory. Thus it was with the Feast of Tabernacles. During its celebration men marveled at its splendor; they talked of it, of the high-priest, of his beauty, of his misfortunes. The festival was over—the excitement had ceased, and men returned to their homes and to their daily routines, with scarcely a sigh. What they had so lately deemed a great misfortune was already vanishing from their minds.

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CHAPTER XI.

The Feast and its Consequences.

ALEXANDRA was to entertain, on the next day, the king, with a number of guests, at her palace at Jericho. That feast had for the present, in the public mind, taken the place of the one of Tabernacles.

The palace at Jericho, with its gardens, its groves, its tinkling fountains, its rushing waterfalls, was associated, in the mind of Mariamne, with the most endearing, sweetest scenes of her life. It was here she had frolicked as a child—loved as a woman. Here, beneath the shade of the citron and the lime, and beside the clear waters of the fountain, her ear had drunk in love's impassioned tale.

No sorrow crossed the sunshine of her young life while she dwelt here; the shadows which passed over it were of another time, another place—she never recalled the one, or visited the other.

With the freedom of an uncaged bird, she flew from

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room to room, from garden to grove, and fountain; every spot was hallowed in her remembrance, and bore the impress of joys long passed away.

In his jealousy, Herod had never permitted his wife, since her unfortunate marriage—which was celebrated at Samaria—to revisit the home of her birth, of her earliest and tenderest recollections. His littleness of soul could not endure that the birds and flowers which she had here fed and tended with her own hands, should call forth those sentiments of fondness denied to him. Even Alexandra had been debarred—by his suspicions of her disloyalty and fear of the Jews, who were numerous, and abided here, and were devoted to the Asmonian family—from inhabiting this, her favorite residence. Since the hollow truce, however, which had been patched up between the contending parties, and the smiling, but deceitful calm that reigned throughout the palace, the princess had obtained permission to go down to Jericho, for the purpose of making preparations for a grand feast, to be given by her in honor of Herod, and of this, her son's first officiating in the high and holy office to which he had been ordained.

The weather had changed. It was no longer clear and elastic, and pleasantly warm, but close and

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sultry, with a partially obscured sun. Light clouds flitted across the blue heavens, now hiding the face of the glorious orb, now sailing away, and permitting his rays to fall resplendent upon earth's green bosom, while shine and shadow followed each other in quick succession, darkening the landscape to almost night, and anon lighting it up with renewed brilliancy.

The windows and doors of the lofty and magnificent dining-room, whose carved roof of cedar was supported by agate columns, were open—they looked out upon courts filled with trees, shrubs, and flowers, and kept green and dewy by the freshening waters that fell around; far beyond, and in the distance, might be seen the lofty and precipitous mountain ranges, towering to the skies, while a plain of surpassing fertility lay at its foot, gently descending in undulating slopes, to the rich valley of the Jordan. Thousands of palm trees, with their tall trunks crowned by clusters of feathery leaves, had given the city one of its names, while intermingled were the fragrant balsam, the scarlet pomegranate, and the variegated rose of Sharon. Truly, it was a scene of picturesque beauty, and, in its calm and tranquil loveliness, looked as if war and devastation had never marred its fair and smiling face.

Alexandra feasted her guests sumptuously. Re-

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clining upon crimson cushions, they drank from jeweled cups the delicious wines of Lesbos, cooled in snow from Lebanon, and as they quaffed the exhilarating beverage, their spirits rose in a tide of tumultuous gayety.

The festivity continued to a late hour; it was getting dark, and the heat had been intense. Herod, during the feast, had unbent from his usual haughty dignity, and talked and smiled graciously; to Aristobulus, he behaved with the affection of a father. He spoke of the fine appearance he made when habited in his high priest's dress, and complimented him upon the propriety and solemnity with which he performed his sacred duties.

Frank and unsuspicious, Aristobulus was pleased with the king's flattering words, and when he proposed they should walk out, he gladly accompanied him. They proceeded towards some very large fish-ponds in a retired part of the grounds, and were presently joined by a few of Herod's friends and servants, who, making the heat an excuse, threw off their clothes and plunged into the water. In the mean while, to accomplish his purpose more securely, and prevent suspicion, the king played with his young kinsman, and then calling his attention to the swim-

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mers, persuaded him to join them, urging that it would greatly refresh him after the day's heat and feasting.

Feeling every disposition to obey, being an expert swimmer, and fond of the exercise, Aristobulus disrobed, and was quickly in the water. The men by whom he was surrounded were creatures of Herod, and placed there for the most deadly purpose. He was allowed by the assassins for some time to swim about unmolested; they then began, as if in sport, to dip him, keeping his head under water for a few moments only, and then letting him go. After this had been done two or three times, Aristobulus, who did not relish such rough play, desired them to desist and keep off. Such, however, was not their orders: and one of the men, fearing his prey might escape, seized and plunged him under the water, and notwithstanding his almost superhuman efforts to free himself from the deadly grasp, he was, with the assistance of several others, kept submerged until he was entirely dead. Having ascertained that the orders of the remorseless tyrant were executed, these miserable wretches swam to a distant part of the pond, leaving the murdered youth to any chance discovery.

While this horrible tragedy was enacting, its author and instigator was pacing up and down a narrow part

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close at hand. The stifled shrieks of his hapless victim, as they smote in gurgling sounds upon his ear, excited no pity; his only feeling was fear lest his victim should escape. He approached the water and listened—the shrieks had ceased, but his quick ear detected the strokes of rapidly-retreating swimmers. The deed was then done, and the dastardly act was a guaranty of his future security. Nevertheless, Herod's heart, bad as it was, shrank from the scene he knew awaited him, when the young prince's death should be discovered. Could he impose upon the shrewd and penetrating mother, the fond and affectionate sister? His reason answered no—but they might, from fear of a similar fate, confine their suspicions to their own breasts: he must not appear before the multitude as the murderer of the young high priest; already obnoxious to the greater part of the Jewish people, as the destroyer of their prince, their hatred towards him would be increased a thousand fold.

Pondering these thoughts, Herod walked quickly towards the palace; he entered by a private door, and gained his own apartment unobserved. Casting aside his outer garments, damp with the heavy night air and spray from the fountain, he assumed one of blue and silver, powdered his beard and hair with gold-dust,

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put a tiara of precious gems upon his head, and then mixed with the guests who entertained themselves, or were being entertained, in various parts of the palace.

The sumptuous apartments were brilliantly lighted, and as the blaze of the thousand candles fell upon the gold and silver and precious stones, they flashed back a radiance rich and dazzling as scenes in a fairy tale.

In one large room, upon purple cushions, and fanned by peacock's feathers, wafted gently to and fro by attendant slaves, reposed, side by side, the lovely Jewish maiden and the fair patrician of Rome. Fatigued by the heat and excitement of the day, they were listening—with their large lustrous eyes half closed, in all that abandonment to the *dolce far niente* for which they were famed—to the soft music, keeping time with the languid motions and the tinkling of little golden bells attached to the slender ankles of dancing girls, who were exhibiting for their amusement.

In another apartment, congregated in knots, were nobles and ladies of high degree, playing at games of chance. The king joined in these games. He laughed, he talked, he flattered the men, and complimented the women; but his manner was perturbed, and his eye wild and restless. Alexandra stood near, conversing with Joseph; their talk was of Aristobulus. At

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the mention of that name, Herod let fall the gilded ball with which he was playing, and cast a hasty glance towards the speakers; their faces were calm—no intelligence, then, of the fatal catastrophe had yet reached them; perhaps it might be concealed until the departure of the guests, which would take place at the rising of the moon, a little after midnight. Yet he was ill at ease; not that he felt any compunction for the dark deed he had caused to be done—far from it. He looked upon it as one of those acts to which he was compelled by the force of circumstances; he had obtained a throne, it mattered not how—he would retain it if the blood of the whole race of Asmonia flowed in rivers at its foot. Nevertheless, he did not wish to be known as the instigator of so barbarous and sacrilegious an act. The Jewish nation had ever been hostile; they hated his father, Antipater—they detested him; and they abhorred being under the yoke of a foreigner. It was scarcely worth while, then, if concealment could be effected, to render himself still more obnoxious, which would certainly be the case, were he publicly known as the murderer of his young kinsman. To be sure, backed by Antony's power and friendship, he was pretty secure; but could the triumvir be depended upon? He scarcely

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knew. He was luxurious, licentious, and entirely under the influence of the cruel Egyptian, who would doubtless make the death of Aristobulus—which she was sure to hear of from Alexandra—a pretext for his being punished; not that she would feel any regret, or really care about the death of the unhappy youth; but being a grasping and avaricious woman, and exceedingly extravagant, she coveted the kingdom of Judea, which she could not obtain but by the death or dethronement of its present possessor.

Thus pondered Herod; and his meditations were not of the most pleasing nature. He flung down the golden balls with which he was playing, for the distraction and pre-occupation of his mind induced continued mistakes; and he saw wondering looks fixed upon him, which at that moment he neither dared to notice nor resent. With an irritated and impatient gesture, he left the apartment, and wandered into one of the courts. To his indescribable joy, he beheld a pale white streak discernible in the distance—the moon was just rising from behind the mountain ranges. Up, up she came, broader and fuller, until her soft, mellow light flooded the clear, unfathomable depths of the mysterious sky, and lay in silent and subdued splendor upon the earth. The whole scene around

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was hushed, and sleeping in the quiet night; no sound was heard save that of the ever-rushing waters, as they leaped and tumbled from precipice to precipice, and the music and revelry borne on the air from the illuminated palace.

Herod heeded nought but the rising moon; another half hour, and she would be sailing high in the deep blue ether, and the greater part of the guests on their way to Jerusalem; those who would remain were his friends—at least in appearance—and whatever their thoughts, self-preservation and fear of him would induce them to hold their peace.

The lights were extinguished, the palace silent, the absence of the young high priest had passed unnoticed, his death was still undiscovered; the morrow's dawn would inevitably reveal the sad event. Herod retired to his chamber, and undressing, sought his couch; but the sleep he wooed refused to visit his eyelids, or, if for a few brief moments he felt its balmy influence, some demon scared it away; for between guilt and the angel of sleep, there is little companionship.

The king passed a miserable night. Had it been caused by regret or the compunctious visitings of conscience, he might have deserved commiseration; but self was the burden of his thoughts. He did not

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sorrow for the revolting and wicked act; only for its possible consequences—nay, in the midst of his anxiety, he rejoiced that in the murder of his princely brother he had rid himself of a dangerous rival.

As the first gray began to appear in the heavens, and drive away the murky reign of night, Herod arose from his uneasy and restless bed. He went to the window, and as he stood looking upon nature, so calm and solemn, so fresh and beautiful in her awakening, before the fervid rays of the rising sun had dried up one pearly drop, drooped the heads of the delicate children of Flora, or scorched and shriveled the long and graceful leaves of the slender palm, he thought he heard the hum of distant voices. He listened; the sounds became more distinct, and were accompanied by wailing and lamentation; the body of the young prince had been discovered, and Alexandra's servants were bearing it to the palace. Presently he heard the heavy doors unbarred, and the bolts shoot back; then there was a shuffling of feet upon the marble floor of the hall, and a letting down, as of some heavy burden. The whole palace was in commotion, doors were opened and shut, and loud shrieks rent the air. Well did the perpetrator of the dismal tragedy know from what cause they proceeded; but wrapping his dressing robe

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about him, and appearing as if just roused by the noise and confusion from his slumbers, he rushed, unheeded, with others, into the hall, and there a scene awaited him, which, if his heart had not been harder than the nether millstone, must have wrung from it tears of blood.

Extended upon a low couch which had been drawn into the centre of the room, and covered with a mantle, lay the mortal remains of the young high priest. Stretched upon the corpse, and to all appearance as insensible, was Alexandra, while beside the couch, in her white night-dress, her hair hanging in dark masses over her shoulders, her cheek as deathly as the one against which her own was pressed, and with an expression of agony and woe unutterable, knelt the queen.

Surrounding the couch were a few of Alexandra's friends, some of her most faithful servants, and a tall, noble-looking youth, with his face enveloped in the folds of his cloak. The rest of the chamber was filled with guests and soldiers, and slaves belonging to the establishment.

"What is all this? What is the matter?" asked Herod, pushing through the crowd, which made way for him; "who is it that has been drowned?—will no one answer my question?"

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"Thou wilt know soon enough, if thou dost not *know* already," said a stern old soldier, as he drew his rough and weather-beaten hand across his eyes.

By this time the king had reached the middle of the hall, where, as if in a calm and tranquil sleep, lay the body of his murdered victim. No change had as yet passed over that beautiful face, except in its exceeding paleness; serene and peaceful it seemed, as if the beautiful spirit might look down with delight from its heavenly habitation upon the fair tenement from which it had been so rudely wrenched.

What were Herod's feelings, as he gazed upon this sad spectacle, the fruit of his own work—who can tell! It may be that all fear of rivalry being now at an end, that there could be no more envyings and jealousy, he did experience an emotion akin to pity, as he looked upon that youthful form, from which, by his means, the vital spark had been so violently expelled; at any rate, he seemed to be deeply touched, and showed every sign of sorrow, even to the shedding of tears. Whether real or affected, this display of grief served his purpose, in averting from him, in some degree at least, suspicion.

Alexandra, still insensible, had been conveyed to her apartment, where her women were using every means

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for her recovery. Approaching the queen, Herod endeavored to lift her from the floor; but, repulsing him with a look of horror, she threw her arms around all that was left of her beloved brother, laid her head upon his breast, and gave way to that bitter anguish, so near akin to despair. As the king's voice, in low tones of entreaty and condolence, fell upon the young stranger's ear, he put aside his mantle, and lifting his face, fixed upon Herod a gaze so stern and penetrating, it seemed as if it would pierce into the very depths of his treacherous heart.

The king recoiled as he met the earnest and resolute eye of the noble Roman, whom he supposed to be many furlongs from thence. It was Lucius Gracchus, a younger branch of one of the most illustrious houses in Rome, and an intimate friend of the young high priest. His father was all-powerful with the emperor, and Herod dreaded the son's influence. He saw that he was more than suspected; he must, if possible, do away with the impression, or he might be cited to appear at Cæsar's judgment-seat to answer for the murder.

Desiring Rachel, who was weeping violently, to attend to her mistress, he went himself to make inquiries respecting the death of Aristobulus. Every individual

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throughout that immense household was questioned, threatened, and some even, whom Herod pretended to suspect of entertaining an enmity against his young kinsman, were punished; but nothing could be elicited, farther than that two men, going at break of day to fish, observed something white lying on the shore, and partly concealed by the brakes and water-lilies; that drawing nigh they were horror-stricken at finding it was the drowned body of the young prince; that these men had run back to the palace in the utmost consternation, and by their loud cries and lamentations aroused its inmates.

Herod stood in the midst of that noble hall, with a face grave and sad, pondering, as if in deep distress. He seemed to be trying to come to some satisfactory conclusion regarding the young man's death. Laying his hand on the shoulder of the Roman:

"This is a terrible ending," he said, "to our season of festivity—one which we shall not be apt soon to forget. My young brother, most probably, was taken ill while bathing, and being alone, has perished for lack of assistance."

Lucius answered not, but shaking off his hand, bent a calm, searching look upon the king. Inured as he was to crime, Herod could not stand that quiet

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scrutiny; he became fiery red, then ashy pale, his lip quivered, his strong frame trembled, and his whole appearance was that of conscious and detected guilt. How he cursed the weakness which allowed, what he termed, the gaze of a mere boy, thus to disconcert him! How he writhed beneath that stony glance, and could he have laid the young Roman as low as the insensible form by whose side he stood, how gladly would he have done it!

As he still continued to regard him, an expression of abhorrence crossed the features of Lucius; he turned upon his heel, and touching with his lips the marble forehead of him he had loved so well, called together his servants and bade them prepare for instant departure. Taking out his tablets, he wrote a few consolatory lines to Alexandra, offering his assistance and influence in any way she might deem expedient in order to the throwing light upon the sudden and painful death of her son; then, without farther notice of the guilty king, he left the palace, mounted his horse, and, followed by his attendants, pursued his way towards the sea-coast, and embarked for Rome.

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CHAPTER XII.

Jerusalem Troubled.

GREAT was the mourning and lamentation in Jerusalem, when the death of Aristobulus was made public; every family looking upon this calamity as if it had happened to one of themselves. The city was a scene of anarchy and confusion. Reports were abroad that the prince had met with foul play, and that Herod, if not the perpetrator, was the instigator of the cruel deed. The hearts of the people were filled with sorrow and indignation. That one so promising —their prince and high priest—should be thus cut off in the bloom of his young manhood, by the base arts of his treacherous kinsman, seemed more than they could bear.

The king was prepared for this outburst; but a consummate actor, he bent to, instead of braving, the storm. He wore an appearance of the deepest grief, expressed himself indignant that those whom he be-

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lieved to be his friends and supporters, and who had received marks of his favor and esteem, should believe him capable of so vile an act; and in short played his part so well, that men began—especially as there was no positive proof—to doubt of his guilt: and when he ordered an embalming, a costly funeral, a magnificent sepulchre, and everything that could testify respect and affection for the dead, if not entirely convinced of his innocence, they were in a great measure pacified, and consoled themselves with thinking, if Aristobulus had fallen by the hand of Herod, he had made all the reparation in his power, and given him a funeral which, for solemnity and splendor, had never been surpassed by any of his ancestors.

Not so, however, with Alexandra. 'The *knowledge* that her son had been purposely slain; the necessity she was under of keeping this knowledge to herself, of appearing not to suspect anything wrong, for fear of a greater mischief which might follow, rendered her grief both obstinate and intense; and but for the hope of being able to revenge this most revolting murder, she would have destroyed herself.

The grief of the queen for the loss of her beloved brother, was equally deep, but it was more quiet and unobtrusive; her spirit seemed completely broken by

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this great and unexpected affliction. A change, sad and overwhelming, had passed over her. Her brother murdered, and by her husband's hands, was an ever-present memory—it haunted her by day, it scared her in dreams by night; her home became hateful to her, and she lived as much as she dared apart from it. Each day might she be seen, her face and person covered by a long veil, kneeling in the temple. There she was free from Herod's detested presence—there she again seemed to see the loved and lost, as she had last beheld him, arrayed in the gorgeous robes of his sacred office, full of grace and beauty, the admiration of the people—the idol of her own warm and affectionate heart—and there in mysterious communion, in that holy viaticum of the soul, she deemed her spirit held intercourse with his.

Since the rude severance of her early ties and removal into Herod's family, Mariamne's life—owing to the envy and jealousy of his mother and sister—had been a scene of constant warfare. Hating and despising the Idumean, and all belonging to him, she considered herself as a kind of scapegoat, upon whose head had been laid the sins and short-comings of all her family. Brought up as all Jewish maidens were, under the strictest discipline to parental authority,

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when Alexandra made it known that her espousals with Zerah were to be annulled, and herself given to the violent young tetrarch, before whom even the sanhedrim trembled, she had nothing to oppose but tears, entreaties and remonstrances. To rebel would have been contrary to the law; for the Pharisees—to which sect she belonged—by their traditions had given unlimited power to parents over their children, and there was for a young maiden no redress, save in the relenting of her natural protectors. The heart of the ambitious and unscrupulous Alexandra, however, was impervious to the pleadings, the agony of her daughter. Herod's persevering and selfish addresses—for Aristobulus had informed him of his sister's attachment and betrothal to another—were accepted, and Mariamne was sacrificed. From that hour a change passed over the young Jewess, her frank and joyous nature was gone, and a spirit of bitterness mingled with her natural sweetness.

During the first years of her married life, she gave the king the duty and obedience, without the love and tenderness of a wife; and this withholding what, from his vehement and insane passion, she knew he most desired, afforded her a strange, troubled sort of pleasure. She felt that the torture he had so selfishly

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inflicted upon her, had recoiled, in some degree, at least, upon himself. But as time went on, and his natural violence became changed to absolute ferocity, and she beheld the best and bravest of his subjects tormented and put to death upon the slightest suspicions, and his palace made little better than a slaughter-house, her dislike was turned to loathing, and this, his last enormity, sealed her abhorrence. She, therefore, shunned the king as she would a pestilence; and when they met, not all his entreaties could extract more than a cold monosyllable, while her whole manner showed how deeply she felt, and how highly she resented, his base and vindictive conduct.

In the mean while, Alexandra was not inactive; she had written a full account of the murder to Cleopatra, and vehemently urged her to exert all her influence with Antony to bring Herod before his tribunal to answer for the atrocious deed. Cleopatra, as far as her cold and selfish nature permitted, really felt a friendship for Alexandra, was extremely desirous to gratify her, and never ceased her representations of the heinousness of Herod's offence, until she had persuaded the Roman to summon him to his presence.

As there was no possible way of avoiding these

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commands, the king prepared, with a heavy heart, to obey, for a guilty conscience made him timid, besides being in fear of the ill-will borne him by Cleopatra; he therefore settled the affairs of his kingdom in the best manner he could, and left Joseph, Salome's husband, to govern in his absence.

The prospect of a violent death, instead of softening his harsh and cruel nature, seemed but to add to its ferocity; and just before his departure, and with the strictest injunctions to secresy, he charged Joseph, in case his life was forfeit, to take that of the queen, remarking, with a grim smile, he loved her too well to bear a separation, even in death. But jealousy, not love, caused him to issue the cruel order—jealousy of the powerful and licentious triumvir, who he knew was deeply enamored of Mariamne's beauty, and would, in all probability, send for her, in the event of the death which he had little hope of escaping. He therefore, without one remorseful feeling, consigned her to a similar fate, and then sailed away to Antony, carrying with him treasures to an immense amount, knowing from *experience* that gifts, and gold, and precious things, would prove his *best defence* with one whose love of wealth had passed into a proverb.

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CHAPTER XIII.

The Departure.

At this time the Triumvir was at Laodicea, reveling away the time he ought to have bestowed on his Parthian affairs, in the company of Egypt's queen. It was the practice of this abandoned woman to accompany Antony whithersoever he went, for she feared, if not constantly in her presence, he might escape her toils, and free himself from the thraldom in which her fascinations held him; besides, she was both extravagant and avaricious, and in these journeys had an opportunity of gratifying her ruling propensity, for as they passed through the countries of tributary kings, she never failed to urge Antony to take away their dominions and bestow them upon her, and he, being entirely under the influence of her charms, generally acceded to her request, though in opposition to his better judgment, and feeling heartily ashamed of

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the part his passion for his wicked enslaver compelled him to act.

At this time, then, the Triumvir, with his fascinating, but false-hearted mistress, was sojourning at Laodicea. It was a glorious eastern night; the moon, in her loveliness and purity, was sailing high in the deep blue ether, as if all unconscious of the scenes which on earth were enacting in her soft, clear light. The banquet provided by Cleopatra for the entertainment of her lover, was spread under tents of purple and gold-colored silk, lighted by crystal lamps, fed with perfumed oil. Within the tents all was life, and light, and beauty; without, the blue and tideless sea, which shone like a path of lapis lazuli, in the calm effulgence of the broad and risen moon. Upon a jeweled throne, pre-eminent in loveliness, sat Egypt's queen, and by her side the great warrior—the man of unequalled might—of unconquerable power—the man who held a world in subjection; his strong limbs clad in silken vestments, his scented love-locks crowned with vine leaves, a very puppet in the hands of the dark witch who enthralled him. To keep the pleasure-loving Roman in a state of constant excitement, to give him no time for reflection, was Cleopatra's design —*she had an end to gain*, and no slave at the galleys

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ever worked harder—she toiled by day and by night, she never left the Triumvir's side, her blandishments, her caresses never ceased—but as yet her efforts had been unsuccessful. Antony, for old friendship's sake, would not condemn Herod without a hearing; neither would he bestow any of his dominions upon the grasping queen. Cleopatra was almost in despair —she dreaded the king's presence, she dreaded his influence, and she constantly urged Antony to make up his mind to his condemnation, before he appeared. Thus far he was unsuccessful, and, unaccustomed to have her sovereign will disputed, even by the imperious Roman, her hatred and malice towards the king knew no bounds.

The purple wine sparkled in the crystal goblet, Cleopatra raised it to her ruby lip, kissed the brim, and handed it to Antony:

"Let us drink to the arrival of the king of Judea," said she; "methinks his barque tarries long."

"Aye," responded the Triumvir, "the perspective of a violent death is not apt to hasten a man's movements; but Herod may trust to my justice."

"Not to thy justice, but to thy partiality—thy *gratitude*," she added, with a sneer; "if thou lettest this Idumean escape, thou art no friend of Alexandra's."

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"And pray, my beautiful mistress," bending upon her his eyes, full of a malicious light, "is it thy *strict* sense of justice—thy *love* for Alexandra—thy anxiety to avenge the death of Aristobulus—or is it thy desire to possess Herod's kingdom, which makes thee so anxious for his death?"

At this query, the dark, voluptuous, and usually sleepy-looking eyes of the queen, emitted a baleful gleam, and as she cast them round the table, filled with guests, almost all of whom had suffered either personally or collaterally from her jealousy or avarice, and beheld the pleased expression worn by every countenance, her cheek burned with resentment, and rising from the table, she haughtily replied:

"The queen of Egypt is not amenable *even* to the noble Antony, for either her words or actions; though methinks he is over fond of putting a wrong construction on both."

"Not so; I only wished to be assured of the disinterestedness of thy motives."

"And thou to be reminded that a vulgar Idumean, raised by thee to a throne which belonged to another, has no right to inflict death upon one of a royal line, admitting it to be deserved, which was not the fact in this poor boy's case."

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The Triumvir rose, laid his hand upon the smooth and rounded arm of the Egyptian, bent forward, and spoke a few whispered words in her ear; she started, turned very pale, and reseated herself. The Roman had recalled to her remembrance the slaughter of her young brother, only fifteen years of age, by her orders; and that of her sister, just emerging into womanhood, while a supplicant in the temple of Diana, at Ephesus.

Though a willing slave to her charms, and almost entirely devoted to her will, Antony had a malicious pleasure in occasionally reminding Cleopatra of her enormities, more especialiy when, with a show of justice, she attempted to interfere with his prerogative. It was, therefore, with a smile of gratified malice, he beheld her present emotion.

There is no saying to what extremities the bad passions of both, excited by mutual recrimination, might have proceeded, if their attention had not been distracted by an unusual noise and stir outside the tent. In another moment the silken curtain was lifted, and Herod stood in the royal and august presence.

If a spectre had appeared, the assembled guests could not have looked more startled. They gazed at each other, at Herod, at Antony, at Cleopatra, and

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then one by one they crept away, as if fearing for themselves the fate they deemed awaited the king.

A cold nod of recognition was the only welcome vouchsafed by Antony, while a frown, dark as the ancient Egyptian night, settled upon the brow of the queen.

Knowing her deadly hostility, Herod was not surprised or confounded by his reception; but knowing also her influence over Antony, and his weakness in yielding to it, he trembled for his life.

Ever impetuous, the Roman waited for no preliminaries, but charged Herod at once with his guilt, desiring to hear what he had to say in extenuation.

The wily Idumean was perfectly aware of the advantage to be derived from thus informally stating his case, and in being freed from the presence of those who might find it their interest to condemn him. He also trusted to Antony's friendship—to his own eloquence—but above all, to the heaps of gold and the rich presents he had brought as a propitiatory offering; he therefore begged, that before entering upon a subject so painful, he might be allowed to lay before them a few trifles which he had brought for their acceptance. This request was acceded to; and as the slaves unrolled piece after piece of those pre-

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cious stuffs, wrought in the looms of Judea, and opened caskets filled with gold, and gems of inestimable value, the frown cleared from the dark brow of the Egyptian, and Antony's face brightened into a smile.

"By the cestus of Venus," said he, "but this is a right kingly offering, and come in excellent season; for my troops are becoming somewhat restive under their non-payment, and this will wipe off old scores and help to begin new ones. Why, Solomon, it is said, made silver in Jerusalem plenty as *stones*, but thou must have turned *them* into gold; but let us pledge each other in a goblet of this ruby wine, and do thou, fair lady," turning to Cleopatra, "sweeten it with a kiss of thy rosy lips; and as the night is far spent, and I am somewhat weary, we will defer farther questioning until to-morrow."

The wine foamed and sparkled to the very brim of the crystal cup—the lips of the queen pressed its edge—the pledge was given and received—the hands clasped in the strong grasp of a *mutual and necessary alliance*, (which was termed friendship,) and the cup, with its exhilarating contents, drained to the bottom.

Herod smiled a deep subtle smile as the last drop rested upon his lip; his mind was at rest, and that night his repose was *undisturbed* and *profound*.

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Cleopatra, convinced that any farther entreaties for the condemnation of Herod would prove unavailing, made a merit of necessity, and submitted with a good grace, inwardly hoping that fortune or some future opportunity would be more propitious; she therefore informed Antony she was now as much averse to Herod's death as she had before been anxious for it, while he assured her, that under existing circumstances, his condemnation would be both disastrous and impolitic; and as there was no proof of his guilt, excepting Alexandra's letter, he had decided upon an acquittal. He farther urged as a motive, that in all his political strifes and warfares, Herod had proved a firm ally, supplying him liberally, not only with men and money, but his own personal services; he was therefore unwilling to destroy a man so every way useful, especially at a juncture when his affairs began to wear a less prosperous aspect, and when, in the anticipated struggle between Octavius and himself, for the world's dominion, one so constitutionally brave, so well versed in the tactics of war, would prove a host in himself; so the matter was settled. Herod was acquitted, and the two were faster friends than ever.

The king was lodged in the palace, sat by the

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Roman's side when he heard causes, was a constant guest at his table, and, in short, nothing could be done without his presence and advice.

To keep Cleopatra in good humor, and to gratify her avarice, Antony bestowed upon her, in lieu of Judea, the beautiful and prolific country of Cillisyria, which she had for a long time coveted, so that for the present, at least, she was content to remain quiet.

Antony had stopped at Laodicea, on his way to Parthia, at the suggestion of Cleopatra, to *rest* and *recruit*, as she phrased it, but in reality that his sojourn might be made a continued festival, for upon his arrival every amusement was devised, every luxury procured, which could steep his senses in forgetfulness, and render her domination more secure. The indolent, licentious, and pleasure-loving Roman, submitted without an effort to a bondage as contemptible as it was injurious, and, immersed in sensuality, had almost forgotten the necessity of exertion.

From this dream of guilty enjoyment he was roused by Herod, who represented the injury he was doing himself by his supine and effeminate life, urging him, if he wished to enter Parthia before the winter set in, to depart at once, promising, if he did so, to see him

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part of the way on his journey, before he entered his own country.

This argument proved conclusive, and the two friends, in spite of Cleopatra's efforts to prevent it, left Laodicea together.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A Secret Discovered.

When Joseph assumed the reins of government, he was perfectly aware of the difficulties with which he had to contend, viz: a factious and discontented multitude on the one hand, and a rebellious and conspiring household on the other. Gentle, yet firm, he hoped, by a judicious exercise of these qualities, to control, if not subdue, the turbulence around him, and make, what he trusted would be a short government, at least a peaceful one; but, as is too often the case, he found those of his own house his bitterest enemies, and the most difficult to manage. Salome's dislike of her husband was turned into absolute hatred by her partiality for another. She had bestowed her worthless heart upon an Arabian, and wished to get rid of Joseph, that she might gratify her passion by a union with Syllius; she therefore exerted all the influence she possessed to foment discontent among the people,

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and create discord in the palace, thinking by this means to render him unpopular, and thereby have somewhat to complain of to her brother, should he return, of which she entertained very little doubt.

Joseph, therefore, found his situation infinitely more arduous than it would have been had Salome co-operated with, instead of opposing him. Entertaining a sincere friendship for Mariamne, he determined that under no circumstances should the order he had received for her destruction be executed. Pitying her truly forlorn state, with so few to feel or sympathise with her, he had taken more than ordinary pains, by numberless little soothing attentions, to make her in some measure forget her sorrows, and render her life more congenial. He was also necessarily obliged to consult with her frequently on public affairs, which induced a greater intimacy than is usually permitted in eastern countries between the sexes, unless related by ties of the nearest consanguinity.

Grateful for his thoughtful kindness, the queen always received Joseph with pleasure, and the hours passed in his society were the least oppressive in her monotonous and weary life. Mariamne, however, never received her visitor alone. She knew that lynx

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eyes were watching her—evil tongues ready to defame her—and her maidens always remained working in the ante-room, where they could see everything that passed, without being able to hear the conversation.

One morning, the queen, Alexandra, and Joseph, were sitting together; the queen was unusually sad, her pale, fair cheek rested on her hand, and her eyes were heavy with unshed tears. Joseph pitied her from the bottom of his heart, but unacquainted with the cause of her increased distress, he maintained a respectful silence.

Alexandra, who was busy with her embroidery, at length raised her eyes, and beholding Mariamne's mournful countenance, said:

"What is it that makes thee so sad to-day, my daughter? Hast heard ill news? Is thy child, my little pet and namesake, worse?"

"No, dear mother; on the contrary, she is much better. I am almost ashamed to own, my disquietude is purely imaginary, caused by a *dream;* but one so vivid and startling, so full of horror, that I cannot but remember it."

"Thou art getting superstitious; but tell thy dream, child, and perhaps Joseph, like his namesake of old, can interpret it."

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"Perhaps so;" and Mariamne fixed upon the regent, a look which quickened the pulsation of his heart, and caused the color to mount to his cheek.

Without noticing his embarrassment, she proceeded to narrate her dream:

"Methought I was walking in the most retired part of the palace gardens, in the grove of myrtle surrounding the fountain of the lake; as I proceeded, footsteps struck upon my ear. I turned—close behind me, with a drawn sword in his hand, the edge of which he appeared to be examining, was that horrible wretch, the Ethiopian eunuch, Herod's *private assassin;* and in the distance, partly hidden by the thick foliage, the *present Governor of Judea.*"

Had Joseph been actually surprised in the situation described, he could not have appeared more guilty; his face assumed an ashy hue, and his eyes, with a wild and distracted gaze, roved round the apartment, as if unable or unwilling to fix themselves upon any object.

Mariamne pitied his distress, for she believed him guiltless of harboring against her any evil intention, though she was convinced, from his confusion, he had received orders to that effect; she shuddered, and felt sick at heart; but the feeling was momentary,

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and her dauntless spirit rose with renewed energy to meet this new danger. Waiting until Joseph had somewhat recovered:

"Thou art strangely affected, methinks, by the relation of my dream. 'Coming events,' it is said, 'sometimes cast their shadows before;' or, in other words, an overruling Providence permits, by supernatural means, the revelation of a guilty secret. Thou canst not deny the vision is but the foreshadowing of a painful reality."

Too upright to descend to the meanness of falsehood, and equally unwilling to betray confidence, though forced and repugnant, the perplexed and distressed Governor remained silent.

"I see it all," said the queen, "words are unnecessary; but thou shouldst better school thy countenance, friend Joseph, if thou dost not wish it at some future day to cost thee thy head."

"But thou canst not imagine, lady," said the agitated regent, as if replying to his own thoughts, "thou surely canst not suppose, under any circumstances, I would have been accessory to so foul a deed. Yet, in Herod's exceeding love originated the cruel order."

"Love! sayest thou? Ay! such love as the kite

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feels for the dove, the wolf for the kid; a love which would immolate its victim upon the altar of its own selfishness, still the pulses of the throbbing heart, make cold and lifeless the elastic form, and with a diabolical satisfaction exult in the ruin. Constantly threatened, my life is never safe from Herod's violence; yet I disdain too much to fear him—and the resolute spirit of my race rises in haughty rebellion against the unprincipled and ferocious tyrant, equally the scourge of my family and this unhappy land."

The regent looked upon that fair young form, so instinct with life, yet so fearless of death—so full of the capabilities of enjoyment, and yet so little left to enjoy, and his soul was filled with pity and admiration. Yet pity was not for her, so noble and so brave—whatever her fate, God had given her a spirit to endure unshrinkingly to the end.

During the colloquy between the queen and regent, Alexandra had remained silent, pondering the words of both. She now turned to Joseph, saying:

"But thou dost not think it probable—even possible—that Antony, after my representation of Herod's offence, will permit his return?"

"I should be wanting in truth if I said I did not. Herod's bravery, the personal assistance he renders

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Antony in his wars, and above all, the immense sums lavished in presents, make his life to the profuse and spendthrift Roman necessary; though generally all powerful, in this instance I fear Cleopatra's influence will fail. Lady, believe me, Herod will return unscathed."

"Such is, and ever has been my impression," responded the queen; the *evil one* whom he serves will take care that a servant so faithful lives out his appointed time. Herod is only upon the threshold of his iniquities, his *master's* work is not yet done, and until it is completed, all human efforts against his life will prove unavailing. But our conference has already been too long, and thy *amiable* wife, Salome, is doubtless advised of the fact."

"Be upon thy guard, Joseph," observed Alexandra, "or that false woman will yet conspire thy death; so unscrupulous a person can always find, or make matter of accusation; and she, with her foreign minion, and younger brother, have been in frequent and secret conclave since Herod's departure."

"Plotting mischief," remarked Mariamne, "against one and all of us."

"Doubtless," said Joseph; "what but mischief could such a mind and heart plot? She confidently

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looks for Herod's return, and is collecting, in her *treasure house*, stores new and old wherewith to entertain him."

"Yes," responded the queen, "she watches my apartments with the eyes of a lynx, and is constantly seen by my people in some of the passages leading thereto; thou never enterest my room or leavest it, that she is not advised thereof, and knows the length of thy visits. So, good friend, to keep the tongue of slander quiet, thou hadst better withdraw; but remember, if thou hast aught of importance to communicate, come without hesitation to my apartments —conscious innocence is ever fearless."

Joseph acquiesced in the prudence of this decision, and with a low and formal obeisance retired.

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CHAPTER XV.

Dark Designs—False Rumors, and Meditated Treason.

Time went on, and in Jerusalem the fate of Herod was yet in obscurity. During the period of uncertainty, continual brawls were occurring—not unfrequently ending in bloodshed—between the lower class of Jews and the fierce and insolent Roman soldiery, encamped within the walls as a guard to the city; while the higher orders, freed in a great measure from the strict watch kept over them by Herod, met at each other's houses to talk over events, and devise means to rid themselves of a thraldom become absolutely intolerable through his cruelty and avarice.

Never did prayers more fervent ascend to the throne of grace for the restoration of health to a beloved object, than those which were universally put up at Jerusalem, for the condemnation and death of its king. It seemed, to this oppressed and afflicted

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people, could they but rid themselves of their tyrant, all other evils in comparison would be light. Alas! they forgot they were no longer free, and that "hydra-headed" evils would continually spring up in the place of those which had disappeared.

At length there came a rumor, a dark whispered rumor, that Herod had been tortured by Antony, and put to death. Men, as they walked about the streets of Jerusalem, wore a mysterious aspect, and endeavored to look grave and concerned, but in each countenance there lurked a light—a light of hope—which for years it had not worn.

Joseph spoke of this rumor to the queen, but told her it was merely a flying report, impossible to trace, and bade her beware how she testified either belief or pleasure at the intelligence, particularly in the presence of Cypros or Salome; for "I am convinced," added he, "it has not the shadow of a foundation."

But Mariamne needed not be thus cautioned; *pleasure* she could not feel at the violent death of even this her greatest enemy; and when she thought that perchance it might be true, and of his sufferings in a strange land, unfriended, and without the solace of religion, a pang shot through her heart, for was he not the father of her children—of those lovely and

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beloved ones, for whom she would willingly have laid down her own life? Forgetting her own injuries, she pondered these things until large tears gathered in her eyes, and her woman's tender and compassionate heart ached for his imaginary sufferings.

To Alexandra, the intelligence gave unalloyed satisfaction. It shone in her eye, spoke in the tones of her voice, and though no word expressed the intenseness of her joy, it could not be mistaken. She wished for Herod's death, therefore she believed it; besides, she had every confidence in Cleopatra's friendship, and she knew her influence with the Roman. Her scheming and ambitious brain was again at work—again, notwithstanding her grief for the loss of her son, was she forming plans for the future aggrandizement of herself and Mariamne. If Antony had put Herod to death, as was currently reported, the supposition was, that he was friendly to them, and could he but see Mariamne, with whose picture he had been so deeply enamored, she doubted not the regal authority would be entirely placed in their hands, and nothing which they could reasonably hope for would be denied them. In order to the furtherance of these designs, she resolved to make Julius—who had the command of the Roman legions which

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lay encamped about the city as a guard to the kingdom—their friend. This, she thought, would be an advantage every way, as in case of any tumult or disturbance, particularly about or within the palace, they would be in greater security. With her usual promptitude, she sought an interview with the regent, and endeavored, by every persuasive argument, to induce him to do her bidding, to the Roman general; but Joseph was firm in his refusal, representing that as they had received no official notice of the king's death, it would be both impolitic and dangerous to proceed to such extremities; for should Herod return, of which he entertained in his own mind no doubt, he would never pardon such an open violation and contempt of his orders, and the least they could expect would be imprisonment—perhaps death.

All his arguments, however, proved unavailing with this ambitious and obstinate woman; and finding Joseph too honest—though as much opposed to the despotic and oppressive government of Herod as herself—to aid or abet in her plots, determined to seek elsewhere a less scrupulous emissary.

Locked in her chamber, a prey to disquietude, Salome was pondering the present and the future. Equally hated and feared as her brother, she knew

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not where to turn, nor whither to fly, her only consolation was in the uncertainty of the report.

In the mean time she kept a watchful eye on all that was passing within the palace. She had noticed Joseph's frequent and prolonged visits to the queen, and though fully aware they were generally on business connected with his government, she treasured them up as matter of accusation—should Herod return—against both.

Affairs were in this unsettled state, when a letter from Herod himself quieted Salome's fears, frustrated all Alexandra's plans, and put an end to the speculations that were agitating every mind in Jerusalem. The letter was to Joseph, giving a full account of his reception by Antony, of his entire disbelief of the charges made against him, and of the high esteem and favor in which he was held by the triumvir. He, moreover, commanded proclamation to that effect to be made throughout his kingdom, that his *loving* subjects might entertain no farther apprehensions for his safety, as, by Antony's favor, he was now more firmly established in his government than ever. He farther added, it was his intention to conduct Antony on his way to Parthia, and that his return might be looked for before the commencement of the inclement season.

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Blank disappointment was the almost universal effect produced by this intelligence. Men's countenances again assumed a look of moody care; fear and hatred, a terrible longing for the vengeance denied them by Antony, and a stern determination to effect, if possible, the tyrant's overthrow, were the prevailing sentiments which occupied men, made desperate by a cruelty and servitude worse than the Egyptian bondage.

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CHAPTER XVI.

The Return.

"WHAT a terrific night!" exclaimed Salome, as, shrouding her eyes with her hands, she retreated to the farthest extremity of the apartment.

"Heaven preserve my son," responded Cypros, as, sliding from her couch, she sank upon her knees, and buried her face in its pillows.

The room was one blaze of livid light, then came a tremendous peal, and the palace shook as if the whole of Heaven's artillery had been discharged in that one explosion. It was truly a wild and fearful night—a long line of fire shot through the murky air, casting a pallid and disastrous illumination on things below. It flashed over the whole horizon, and covered the temple with a blaze which made it appear like a "mass of metal glowing in the furnace;" every pillar, every stone, every pinnacle, was seen

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with a fearful distinctness. The wind rushed down the narrow streets, howling dismay as it pursued its fearful course, tearing up every opposing obstacle, and whirling it high into the impenetrable darkness, while heaven's unclosed flood-gates threatened the devoted city with a second deluge.

A servant entered the chamber where sat the two women, lighted the golden lamps, drew down and closed the heavy curtains—he paused in his employment, and listened.

"Methinks," said he, "I hear the tramp of horses, and the voices of men in the outer court; surely it must be my lord the king returned."

"My brother!" ejaculated Salome, rushing to a window, and throwing it open, forgetting in her joy at the prospect of his arrival, that the storm still raged with unabated violence. Another flash, and then a peal, as if heaven and earth were coming together, and stunned and blinded, she reeled back to the centre of the room.

Oaths and imprecations, the pawing and snorting of horses as if in deadly fear, the clanging of armor and ringing of swords upon the stone pavement, as the soldiers dismounted from their frightened and

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jaded steeds, were now distinctly heard, mixed with the roaring of the tempest.

"It is the king!" almost shrieked Salome, as she flew along the passages, and through the cloisters to meet him. "Heaven be praised, I am once more in safety. And now, Joseph and Mariamne, look to yourselves." She sped on, until, travel-worn and drenched to the skin, she encountered Herod in one of the passages; with a cry of delight she threw herself into his extended arms, and for once her joy at seeing him was sincere, for was he not her safeguard against a popular hatred—the instrument through whom she was to inflict her premeditated vengeance? The king warmly returned her embrace.

"And art thou the only one, my sister, who hath watched for the wanderer's coming, and art near to welcome him back from his perilous journey? My wife, my beloved Mariamne, where is she—and how fares it with our mother?"

"The storm may have prevented those not on the *watch* from noting thy arrival," said the artful Salome, "and I am much mistaken if either the queen or Alexandra are particularly desirous of thy return; but hasten, dear brother, and exchange those dripping

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garments; thou tremblest, and thy hands are icy cold."

Herod did indeed tremble, but it was from agitation, and an undefined fear at Salome's words, not from fatigue or cold.

"What now," he demanded, sternly, "what devil's mischief has been brewing during my absence?"

"I will tell thee nought," she replied, "until thou puttest off thy wet clothes, then come to our mother's chamber, who is doubtless by this time advised of thy coming. She will corroborate every word of the tale I have to tell, which, sooth to say, is not an over pleasant one."

With these words she left him, and went to prepare Cypros for the interview.

The king's arrival was soon known throughout the palace; it was heard by Mariamne with cold and haughty indifference, with dread by Alexandra.

"And where is the king?" demanded the former, of the trusty eunuch who brought the intelligence.

"With his mother. Salome was the first to meet and welcome him, and, like another Satan, I doubt not she is filling his ears with lies."

A bitter and scornful smile rested on the parted lips of the queen, as she replied:

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"It is a meet office, and one she will perform with a hearty good will. Would to God her falsehoods might prevent the king from ever again entering these apartments."

"That, my honored mistress, they will never do," said the faithful and attached Hafiz; "Salome's scandalous tongue may, and undoubtedly does, irritate the king against thee, but his love is ever more powerful than his anger, and in thy presence all is forgotten."

"I want not his love, and I defy his anger; he has made my life a burden, and I care not how soon I lay it down; but, Hafiz, we will speak no more on a subject so painful—send Rachel to me, and then retire to the anteroom, and let me know if the king appears."

Herod's toilet on this eventful night was a short one, and with his mind filled with jealousy and suspicion, and every angry passion stirred, he was ready to listen, and believe all Salome might think proper to tell him. He strode on to his mother's chamber, and scarcely had he passed its threshold when he felt himself folded in her embrace. Cypros, the only one of his family who really loved Herod for himself, was entirely overcome at the sight of her son alive and

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well, and as she clasped his neck, tears like rain fell from her eyes on his bosom; she was, perhaps, the only person for whom the king had never entertained an unkind thought; weak in intellect, but amiable and affectionate, her intense love for this her favorite son was so evident, that it banished from his mind all suspicion of its sincerity, and he therefore relied upon her affection with the utmost confidence. In his moody hours he not unfrequently sought her apartments, and her ready sympathy soothed and comforted him, and had it not been for Salome, this intercourse might have been attended with the most beneficial effects; but over her mother she exercised unlimited sway, the sway of a strong mind over a weak one. Cypros, therefore, saw with her daughter's eyes, and heard with her ears, and knew not that all the time she was being deceived; but to do Herod and Salome justice, they endeavored to keep their more flagrant acts from her knowledge, and being of a mild and retiring disposition, she never knew half the guilt in which the two dearest to her were plunged.

Herod seated himself by her side, with his arm around her waist, and having satisfied her that he felt no ill effects from his ride through the storm, and answered all her inquiries, turned to Salome, saying:

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"I am impatient for thy communication; let me hear thy tale, and quickly, for I am determined to know the extent of the matter whereof thou spakest to me, before I sleep, and remember, as it proves true or false, as there is a heaven above, so will I deal with thee."

At this threat Salome trembled, and the color forsook her cheek; but recollecting how often such denunciations had fallen harmless, she soon recovered from her embarrassment, and with an unblanched cheek and steady voice, detailed—exaggerating as she proceeded—the whole of Alexandra's premeditated treason, "which," added she, "nothing but thy letter to Joseph prevented her putting in practice."

"It is well," in a voice of deep and concentrated passion; "and now, what of the queen?"

Salome paused and hesitated, as if afraid or unwilling to speak, when Herod sprang from his seat, and grasping her arm, said in a voice deep and stern:

"I again ask thee what of my wife, Mariamne?"

"She loves another and is false to thee!"

The king let go her arm, and looking steadfastly in her face, while an incredulous smile curled his lip, said:

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"Salome, I believe this to be a vile slander, and if it proves so, it will fare ill with thee if thou hast any hand in its fabrication; but who is her reputed paramour?"

"Even Joseph, thy brother-in-law, the man in whom thou hast placed implicit confidence, the husband of thy sister."

"And of my daughter," replied Cypros; "the fact is known throughout the palace, for in truth they make no secret of their meetings, spending together long hours, and openly expressing their wish that thou mightest never return."

"It is too true," responded Salome; it was but yesterday my tire-woman saw them in close conversation in one of the dark alleys in the garden."

"And is it even so—and has she whom I believed pure as the snow on Sinai, and cold as the frozen particles that glitter on its surface—has she indeed sacrificed to a new passion the love of her youth, her beloved Zerah, and allowed a guilty flame to be lighted in her heart—a flame which all my efforts have never for one moment been able to kindle."

He covered his eyes with his hands, and then throwing them over his head—"Mariamne! Mariamne!" he exclaimed wildly, "if this tale be true,

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deep and deadly shall be my vengeance—ay! even though my heart break in inflicting it. But I will away, and tax the adulteress with her crime; and by the God she worships, if she cannot clear herself from so foul a stain, to-morrow's sun shall lighten upon her headless corpse, and that of her vile paramour."

So saying, and before Cypros, who knew his violent nature, and dreaded the consequences, could stop him, he was gone.

A few minutes served to bring him to the queen's apartments, when, striding through the ante-room without noticing Hafiz—who had not heard his approach until too late to notify his mistress—he threw open the door of a large and magnificent chamber, brilliantly lighted, where sat Mariamne entirely alone, playing upon the harp. Without one word of greeting, he entered upon his mission, and taxed her with her guilt, when a scene of violence ensued.

Mariamne remained perfectly still, with her large dilated eyes fixed upon his distorted countenance, attempting neither to answer nor interrupt him.

"Hast thou nothing to urge in thy defence?" he asked, furiously, seeing she did not speak.

"Nothing!" she answered contemptuously, while

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her cheek glowed, and her lip quivered, "except that the tale is as vile and false as the heart of her who invented it."

"Wilt thou, then, swear that thou dost not love Joseph, and hast never had criminal intercourse with him?"

The queen rose from her seat, and, resting her hand on her harp, said:

"I scorn to repel a charge which in thy inmost soul thou knowest to be false, and which could only have emanated from that fiend in woman's shape, thy sister Salome. But admitting the tale to be true, what right hast thou—after ordaining my death in case thou didst not return—to interfere? That command has severed us completely, as if the destined grave had already closed over me."

"And to it thou shalt go, and that speedily," said Herod, drawing his sword, and rushing furiously towards her. "False, shameless woman! thy blood shall wipe out my dishonor and thy guilt, for it must have been in hours of impassioned love and dalliance, that Joseph revealed to thee a secret, the disclosure of which he knew would be at the peril of his life. Yet no!" he added, holding her at arm's length, and gazing on her beautiful and now pale face, "I can-

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not slay thee thus: but thy lover—in his death thou shalt die a thousand. Ho! guards, one of thy company to the chief captain; here is my signet, give it to him, and bid him send a soldier, and have the traitor Joseph's head struck off; and remember, if one hour from this time my commands are not obeyed, his shall supply its place."

"Mercy!" shrieked Mariamne, "commit not so foul a deed; Joseph is innocent."

"Ha! hath thy boasted indifference fled at the near approach of death to thy minion; saidst I not, thou wouldst die a thousand deaths in his?"

"Monster!" exclaimed the queen; then throwing herself at his feet. "Oh! steep not thyself in guilt so deadly, stain not thy soul with the blood of an unjustly accused, an innocent and persecuted man."

"Thy prayer is vain," responded Herod, sternly, "and in thy anxiety for Joseph's life, I only see farther proof of his guilt. Return thanks to thy God that my clemency has spared thee, wanton as thou art."

Mariamne rose from her knees; every sign of the agonized, timid, shrinking, fearful woman had disappeared, and in their place was seen the high-souled, dauntless, Jewish princess. She stood confronting

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her cruel husband, in all the majesty of outraged innocence—she was deadly pale; but in her large, dark eyes, burned the indomitable spirit of her lofty race:

"Coward and assassin," she began, "thou hast truly said, my prayer is vain, for when was thy fierce and savage nature ever known to feel a touch of remorse or pity? When, dragged a loathing victim to thy arms—when thou didst cruelly persecute and compel to fly from his native country the betrothed of my youth—when to rid thyself of one thou deemedst a dangerous rival to thy power, thou didst cause my young, beautiful, and beloved brother, the princely Aristobulus, the rightful heir to thy usurped and now tottering throne, to be put to death—and lastly, when thy cruel mandate is sending an unprepared soul to meet its God—has one ray of pity, one compunctuous feeling, ever touched thy obdurate and vengeful and ferocious heart? Never! And as thou hast dealt by others, so will God deal by thee, and in thy hour of extremest need, instead of lamentations and mourning, there shall be a howl of delight, a yell of rejoicing—rejoicing, that the scourge of Judah is about to be removed."

Mariamne paused, and Herod, whom astonishment at her boldness had kept silent, now raged round the

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apartment like one beside himself; he stamped, tore his beard, and, in the height of his fury, hurled his sword—as if afraid he might be tempted to use it against the daring woman before him—to the other end of the apartment; it struck against a small and exquisitely sculptured statue of the goddess Diana, and shivered the beautiful creation to atoms. This exploit seemed to recall him to his senses, for in his new and *compelled* religion, he had never forgotten his old one, but still retained a superstitious reverence for the deities so long worshipped by his ancestors. It appeared to him, therefore, that the deed he had committed was little less than sacrilege, and unless atoned for, might bring upon him the evils so forcibly depicted by his wife. He stood a few moments looking at the wreck he had made, and then, with a secret ejaculation for forgiveness, internally promised the goddess a golden image, to replace the one his unbridled passion had destroyed. Having thus satisfied a superstitious conscience, he turned to the queen, and with the glare of the wild beast he most resembled, bid her begone, unless she wished to share the fate of the traitor Joseph. An expression of disdain rested upon the beautiful, pale face of the queen, as she replied:

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"Go, oh! how willingly, to the uttermost ends of the earth, if by so doing I could rid myself of thy hated presence. But think not to intimidate me with thy threats; I fear not death, and would welcome it under any form, as a happy release from the life of violence and misery to which thy fierce and turbulent passions have consigned me."

With this adieu, and while the words were yet tingling in his ears, Mariamne left the chamber, and the next morning, ere the sun had risen from behind the hills, she, with her children, and a few faithful domestics, were seen wending their way towards the summer palace.

With a heart filled with bitterness and wrath, Herod went to seek Alexandra, and having taxed her with her treason, which she could not deny, he next accused her of fomenting the discords which were perpetually occurring in the palace. Without allowing her to utter a word in defence, he ordered a guard, and sent her, though it was past midnight, and the weather still stormy, to Alexandrium, there to remain in close confinement, to prevent her, as he tauntingly observed, from any farther meddling in state affairs, or contriving mischief.

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CHAPTER XVII.

The Letter.

Each year, as it passes, brings the same warnings, hopes, wishes, disappointments. The year wears round,—winter, spring, summer, autumn,—each in turn has brought its gifts and done its utmost, but they are over, and the end is come. All is past and gone, all has failed, all has sated. Thus thought, thus felt Mariamne. The revolving year had brought with it a new era.

Twelve moons had rolled their weary round since the death of Joseph and her departure from Jerusalem, and been swept with all their changes into the irreclaimable past: they were as if they had never been, save in transpired events, written on memory's tablets in characters of fire.

The queen was again in the Holy City, recalled thither by Herod's mandate, who made Alexandra's freedom the price of her obedience. Wearily and

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sadly passed her days, for in the monotony and etiquette of a court there is little to excite the imagination or interest the heart, and her mother, once more at liberty, was employed as usual in intrigues and cabals, and had neither time nor sympathy to bestow upon a daughter, for whom—except as she ministered to her ambition—she cared but little. Neither had Zerah's promised letter arrived, and sick from hope deferred, she scarcely now expected it: yet with woman's unswerving faith, she loved and trusted still, and cherished his image in the depths of the heart which had beat for him alone.

Among many causes of vexation and disquietude, Mariamne had one source of thankfulness—Herod's frequent and prolonged absences, occasioned by Cleopatra's insatiable rapacity. In their progress through Arabia and Judea, Antony, at her earnest entreaties, had despoiled the governors of those countries of part of their possessions in order to bestow them upon her. These enormities and acts of injustice rendered the triumvir exceedingly unpopular; and Cleopatra, who was known to be the instigator, shared in the general odium; but perfectly indifferent to public opinion, she swept on her devastating way. Herod, who was as extravagant and nearly as rapacious as the Egyptian,

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determined to get these provinces in his possession by farming them from her for a certain sum. To effect this he had gone to Damascus, whither Cleopatra was sojourning, and from thence they had departed to Jericho, where Herod was entertaining her with royal splendor. In order to do her honor, and gratify her thirst for magnificence and display, he had commanded the attendance of the greater part of his court, including Mariamne, as the Egyptian wished to see the original of the portrait whose beauty had so inflamed the heart of Antony. The queen, however, positively refused to obey, a circumstance of which Herod, in his secret heart, was glad, for he still loved Mariamne with a violent, an uncontrollable passion, and greatly feared her being seen by the licentious Roman, who was on his return from Armenia; well knowing that if he once beheld her he would leave no method untried to get her in his power.

Hardly six weeks had elapsed since Herod went down from Damascus to Jericho, and he still kept revel there with the Egyptian Circe, who was endeavoring to enslave him, as she had before enslaved Cæsar and Antony; but the king who divined her motives laughed at her arts, and despised her meretricious charms, and though he showed her every

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attention and courtesy—for he dreaded her vengeance —he still kept free from her toils.

Mariamne's life, in the meanwhile, passed in a peaceful monotony. Reading, instructing her children, playing upon the harp, and working with her maidens, occupied much of her time; her leisure moments were spent in wandering about the extensive gardens of the palace, or inhaling the fresh air from its terraced roof. It was a warm, hazy evening, the sea-wind had sprung up with the coolness and purity of a gush of fountain waters, and Mariamne had gone up thither to enjoy its balm, and to *think*. All around her the air was fragrant with the perfume of flowers growing in large pots of baked clay, quaint and fantastic in their shape, and ranged round the low stone balustrade. Beneath her, like a vast panorama, lay the ancient and magnificent city,—the city of David, the "sweet singer of Israel"—while from the centre of Mount Moriah, shining through the purple haze like an "island of light," rose the glorious Temple. It was the hour of evening prayer; loudly sounded the silver trumpets and forth went the people.

The streets of Jerusalem and its house-tops were alive with worshippers, and the sacred fire that for ever burned on the Altar of Sacrifice in the central

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court, gleamed out like a meteor through the dusky clouds.

With the sacrifice rolled up a volume of incense, then came the chant uttered by a thousand voices—deep, fervid, distinct, and clear—the aspirations of devoted hearts ascending to the great Invisible. Mariamne knelt down, and bowing her face upon her clasped hands, wept bitterly. Memory was busy within her, and imagination pictured her beloved brother as she had last seen him ministering in his youthful beauty in that Holy Fane. Where was he now? Cut off in the very spring of his life, and, like a cropt flower, laid low by the hand of a ruthless tyrant. Joseph, too, the kind and good, hurried to the land of shadows by Herod's jealous fury. And Zerah—where was he? Fallen, perhaps, by the same dark power—all, all gone, fallen and swept away like leaves in autumn. Heavy sighs burst from the queen's agitated bosom, warm tears welled up, drop by drop, as she cast a backward glance upon her past life, and a melancholy, deeper and darker than that which already, like a pall, enveloped her, settled around her heart. So profound was her abstraction that time passed unheeded, and when she lifted her tear-bedewed face, night had fallen deeper than usual,

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and the stars were shining pale and soft through the hazy atmosphere.

The streets were deserted—the lights in the Temple extinguished—all—save the ever-flaming censer, which, like a great illuminated pearl, burned steadily on the Altar of Sacrifice.

The queen rose, and wrapping her veil about her, leaned over the balustrade. How had a few hours changed the aspect of the populous city! Its streets, so lately instinct with life, were now deserted—save by the watchmen who went their nightly rounds, and the sentinels keeping guard upon the walls, while its inhabitants lay buried in slumber profound as the grave.

The silence was oppressive, and Mariamne turned towards the entrance of the turret which led to her own apartments, when, emerging from a projection in the wall, a tall figure stood before her. Somewhat startled, she was moving hastily on, when the light from a lamp revealed the features of her eunuch of the chambers.

"What dost thou here, Hafiz?" demanded the queen, "has my lord the king returned?"

"No, lady; but there is a messenger here since the night fell dark, who refuses to tell his errand, or name

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the place from whence he came, save to thyself alone; truly, he seems to have travelled far, and as he is very impatient to be gone, I came hither to seek thee."

"And thou didst well," said the queen, in a tremulous voice; "conduct him to the ante-chamber, I will be there anon."

When Hafiz had departed, Mariamne sank upon one of the stone seats; her heart beat wildly, and with emotions to which it had long been a stranger, while a rich crimson suffused her neck and face.

"It must be," she mentally ejaculated, "it must be the long-looked-for, the long-promised letter. I shall see once again the characters traced by that beloved hand; once again learn that time and absence can never obliterate a love which, begun in childhood, can cease but with life." A tear stole over her glowing cheek, but hastily wiping it away, she rose, and proceeded to give audience to him who she hoped and believed was Zerah's messenger. She found the man alone in the ante-room.

"Art thou the queen?" he asked, bending before her until his forehead nearly touched the ground.

"I am; what wouldst thou?"

The Egyptian removed his turban, and took from the folds a small sealed package, round which was

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bound, as if for additional security, a broad band of floss silk. Kneeling, he presented it to the queen, whose trembling and eager hand was stretched out to receive it, while her eyes devoured the superscription. Yes, there were the well-known and unmistakable characters, and a flood of joy rushed like a torrent across her woe-worn heart.

"Rise, young man," she said; "thou hast done thine errand well; and here," taking from her neck a chain of blood-red rubies and throwing it over his, "thou must wear this in token of Mariamne's friendship and approval."

"Right willingly, sweet lady," said the delighted youth, pressing it to his lips, and concealing its sparkling beauty beneath his tunic, "it shall be unto me as a talisman. I pray heaven"—with a somewhat arch but perfectly respectful glance,—"my good master may not envy me its possession."

A faint blush at this sally tinged the fair cheek of the queen, who, taking from the table a small silver bell, summoned to her presence her trusty eunuch. "Take this youth to thine own apartment, my good Hafiz; supply him with a change of raiment, and see that he has every necessary refreshment; his journey has been long and toilsome, and

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he must needs be both hungry and weary: be cautious, I would not he should be seen by any belonging to the palace."

"I understand, lady," said Hafiz; "thou canst trust to my discretion; come with me, Hassen, and I will see what can be done for thy comfort, for in truth thou lookest somewhat worn and travel-stained."

"Ah!" said Hassen, with a gay smile, "sleepless nights, hard riding and short fare, are not wont to improve a man's appearance; but shouldst thou ever visit Alexandria, good Hafiz, thou wilt find me"—with a little air of conceit,—"altogether a different person; but"—looking at the hour-glass—"I have scant time to stand gossiping here, "I must be away from Jerusalem before peep of dawn."

"How wilt thou be able to leave the city at so unseasonable an hour?" demanded the queen, "the gates are locked, and sentinels keep guard upon the walls."

"I have a passport from the Roman general, who is a friend of my lord Alcansor; I came after nightfall and must away before it is light; my lord does not wish me to be seen in the streets of Jerusalem."

"Haste thee, then; and when thou art ready to depart, Hafiz will attend thee hither to receive my commands."

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The queen turned away, entered her chamber, and closed and locked the door. She then took from her bosom the precious letter, and stood looking upon it as she held it open in her hand. How beautiful she appeared at that moment! Yet it was more the beauty of expression than of feature, for a sweet and happy smile dwelt upon her parted lips, and her whole soul seemed concentrated in that deep, earnest, and downward gaze. It is strange, most strange, how at any given signal, be it a touch, a tone, a look—events buried deep in our hearts, and over which long years have drawn a veil, rush up to memory. As Mariamne contemplated her own name traced by that beloved hand, visions of her youthful days, which had flitted away like summer clouds, rested there—clear and distinct as if the finger of time had only just passed over them. She pressed the missive to her lips and to her heart, and then severed the string, to read within the folded pages a love as deep, as devoted, as faithful as her own:

Zerah's Letter to Mariamne.

"How shall I find words to express my loathing and abhorrence of the dark and cruel deed, which has desolated thy home since last we met, or offer con-

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solation to thee, O thou bereaved, wounded, and stricken dove.

"When I take a retrospective glance, and recur to the events which have transpired within the last twelve months, to afflict and wrong thee, I am almost tempted to turn assassin, and rid the world of a monster, unfit by his crimes to cumber God's glorious earth.

"How can I speak to thee of hope, when its light has departed from my own soul? or bid thee wait patiently for a change, when, alas! no change comes? Past events have verified thy words, and thy persecutor and Judea's scourge, 'seems, indeed, to bear a charmed life.'

The act of flagrant injustice committed by Antony against thy royal house, my beloved Mariamne, in screening the murderer of Aristobulus from the fate he so richly deserved, is but a type of the haughty and over-bearing insolence continually evinced by the Romans towards our enslaved and oppressed race. Banished from my native country to appease the jealousy of a low-born tyrant; compelled to assume a disguise abhorrent to my soul, to prevent my life falling a sacrifice to his threatened vengeance, I live a monument of the tyranny and injustice by

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which we are everywhere surrounded. When I think of these things—and when is memory ever unfaithful to her trust?—a fierce indignation seizes me; my blood, like molten lava, boils in my veins—searing, scorching, maddening, as it rushes along.

"Mine own love, thou mayest have had—this long, long time that no tidings have reached thee—hard thoughts of thy Zerah; yet that can hardly be, knowing each other so well, and feeling so truly the depth and constancy of the love which binds our hearts in one; suspicion of each other's truth would be little less than sacrilege. I could not believe thee faithless, or careless, or indifferent; no, not if thine own lips declared it—and thus thou hast thought of me, my Mariamne; is it not so? And now, feeling sure thou hast not, spite of appearances, deemed me neglectful, nor unkind, nor forgetful, I will proceed with my record of events since our last long separation.

"The cold, gray dawning was just breaking over the heavens, when, with a pang like the severing of soul and body, I tore myself from thy presence, and nothing was left me but the memory of those few, short, blissful hours, passed away forever.

"Long before the first rosy streak shot up in the east, I had, with my faithful Hassan, passed the

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gates of Jerusalem, and was some distance on my way to the port where lay the ship in which we were to embark for Alexandria. Nothing of consequence occurred on the passage. Upon my arrrival, I found it necessary to make preparations for my immediate departure with the army into Syria.

"The affairs of that country were in great confusion, and though the army of Cleopatra, in which thou knowest I hold a high rank—was victorious in several pitched battles, we found it extremely difficult to reduce the inhabitants to submission. It was while scaling the walls of a fortified city, that I received a dangerous wound, so dangerous that I was compelled to remain for many months in Syria, hovering between life and death, and totally incapable of the slightest exertion. My kind and faithful Hassan nursed me through this illness with the tenderness of a woman. The Almighty blessed his exertions, and I was at length, though dreadfully altered, and nearly helpless, permitted to return to Alexandria. Here I learned from my mother's brother that Herod's suspicions, regarding our previous knowledge of each other, had been aroused at the amphitheatre—doubtless occasioned by the events which there transpired; that his emissaries had been in the city in order to discover if

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such a person as Alcansor resided there, and who he was; these inquiries were soon answered, as I am nearly as well known here as Herod in Jerusalem. Having satisfied themselves, from the answers received to their queries, that it would be rather *dangerous* to meddle with me or my concerns, they speedily left Alexandria, to report the success of their mission to Herod. This occurrence prevented my sending immediately, upon my return, the promised tidings—which I both wished and intended—as I feared my messenger might be surprised, and for thy sake, my beloved, I deemed it most prudent to excite no farther suspicions in Herod's mind, but wait for a more convenient season, which the king's absence has at length presented. Alexandria being the seat of luxury and elegance, is *necessarily* somewhat addicted to *scandal*—to which the conduct of the queen and her court gives great license—and rings with the doings of its sovereign and the king of Judea. The magnificence of Herod's entertainments at Jericho, they say, has never been equalled, except in the suppers caused to be prepared by Cleopatra for Antony. Manifold are the opinions as to the cause of this almost unheard-of magnificence and display. Some think it a propitiatory offering, intended by Herod to mollify the queen's

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hatred towards him; while others maintain he has fallen, like those before him, a victim to her arts, and is desperately in love. It is very certain that, like the spider, she never lures but to destroy—and should she once get Herod within her toils, the subtle *poison*, in which she so freely deals, will soon be made to do its work. I much fear, however, the king is too wary to be thus caught, and though he dare not contemn or withdraw from her advances, her spells will fall harmless.

"Two persons of more consummate art or more utterly depraved, never played against each other the game of life, and I would sacrifice every earthly good, save *thee*, my Mariamne, to see them both fall victims to the contest; such a termination would rid the world of two human *vampires*, whose cruelty and oppression have become too intolerable to be borne. The deaths of the princely Aristobulus and of Joseph, are, I fear, but the forerunners of that of thy aged grandfather, Hyrcanus, should Herod's entreaties prevail upon him to leave the safe and honorable asylum, where for so many years he has lived beloved and respected. My uncle, who is one of his oldest and most esteemed friends, and with whom since his exile he has kept up a correspondence, received from him,

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since my return to Alexandria, a letter, in which he tells him how urgent Herod is for him again to make Jerusalem his home; saying,—'It is very unseemly for so old a man, one, moreover, of a royal line, and withal so nearly connected with him, to be dependent upon strangers, when his own nation is so desirous of having him once more amongst them.' Herod also promises, if thy grandfather will gratify him in this particular, and return, he shall have an equal share in the government, be treated with all possible respect, and have the upper seat at public meetings. Thy mother is very desirous he should accept the king's offer—doubtless in the hope of furthering some of her ambitious projects—and has written to that effect; and I much fear that Hyrcanus, spite of my uncle's advice, will be induced—by their joint entreaties and his extreme anxiety to visit his native land, to end his days amongst his own people, and worship in the glorious temple, which every Jew considers more or less identified with himself—to yield to their repeated solicitations.

"Should he do so his fate is sealed; the last male of a royal race, he will be sacrificed to the unquenchable jealousy of the tyrant.

"For thy *personal* safety, my soul's idol, I have

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no fears. Herod's passion will prevent his touching thy life, yet it is horrible to live exposed—at one time to the fierce expression of his love—at another to his threats and reproaches. Oh! it is a bitter agony to witness those we love enduring great torture without the power of alleviating their sufferings—it breaks the heart—it maddens the brain—and how, or in what way, can I alleviate thine? star of my sad and lonely existence. To fly from Herod would but aggravate thy destiny, for in what corner of the world couldst thou hide that his power would not find thee? It is true, Antony could protect thee, but to him I dare not commend thee? Unprincipled, voluptuous, and luxurious, and already enamored of thy picture, thou wouldst be subjected to overtures the most dishonorable, and have to contend, not only against these, but the fierce jealousy of Cleopatra, who would brook no rival in the king's affections.

"We must, then, my beloved, endeavor to wait *patiently*, in the hope, faint though it be, of brighter days. The approaching war between Antony and Octavius may make a change; should the latter prove victorious, Herod, who is the fast friend and ally of Antony, may be hurled by the conqueror from his present height into his original obscurity, or made

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to pay with his life for his crimes. We will, at least, endeavor to keep the star, once so bright, now so pale from going entirely out, and trust to that Almighty Power, who, for his chosen people, caused the sea to be as dry land, and the flinty rock as a well-spring of the purest water. The All-Wise has ever been merciful, gracious, and long-suffering; but they whom, through so many and great dangers, he has preserved, how have they requited his providential care? By murmuring, complaint, and the basest ingratitude; for this they have been tormented, afflicted, sold as bond slaves, and their country laid under a foreign yoke. Yet He has promised He will not keep His anger forever, and though His vengeance now burns fiercely upon our rebellious race, a season will come when those whom he has chosen as the ministers of his wrath, will be contemned and trampled upon even as those whom they now so grievously oppress. Let such thoughts, mine own love, keep thee from despair.

"My Mariamne, thou wilt send me a few lines by my messenger, if only to say thou art safe and well; thou mayest trust Hassan, implicitly, he is a noble youth, and would suffer death rather than betray confidence.

"And now, my first, my last, and only love, fare-

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well! I shall embrace every possible opportunity of communing with thee, and if the intervals prove long, thou must still have faith, and bear ever in mind that time and space can never diminish a love which has grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength; and remember, though distant far, I am apprised of all which takes place, not only at Jerusalem, but in the palace; and should danger threaten, where alone my heart is garnered, there will I be, to shield, protect, or share it with thee.

"Once more, farewell! That the God of our fathers may bless, protect, and keep thee, is the unceasing prayer of thy faithful and devoted

ZERAH."

An expression of ineffable happiness and content stole over the queen's lovely face. How consoling the belief of one true and faithful heart, watchful to protect and guard her, who, in the midst of its own harrassing anxiety, still nestled her image in its most secret depths, making it an ever present memory. To these thoughts succeeded others of a far less pleasurable nature. The gray head of her aged grandfather, under the gory axe of the executioner, presented itself so distinctly that she involuntarily closed

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her eyes, as if by so doing she could shut out from her mental vision an object of such extreme horror; shuddering, she started from her seat, and falling upon her knees, poured forth a fervent prayer, beseeching God's protecting care for those she loved, far, far better than herself. As she proceeded, all worldly cares vanished, and her purified spirit seemed mounting upon angel's wings into the very presence of him she worshipped. Comforted and tranquilized, she rose from her knees, and placing herself before a small writing-table, commenced an answer to the letter which lay open before her. It was brief, for she saw by the hour-glass which stood by her side that the allotted time had nearly expired; but it was full of a love stronger than death—of words of hope, of comfort, of encouragement, of an unswerving, unfaltering faith in all appertaining to him, and in sentiments noble and elevated as the heart from whence they sprang. The letter concluded, the queen was securing it with her signet, when the door of the ante-room cautiously opened, and Hafiz entered with the messenger. Rest, refreshment, and an entire change of garments, made Hassan appear what he really was, a remarkably handsome and noble looking young man. His dark, lustrous eyes, sparkled with intelligence; his hand-

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some mouth expressed determination joined with tenderness and good humor, while truth and honesty were written in unmistakable characters upon his broad and open brow.

The queen regarded him attentively, and then, as if perfectly satisfied, held out the letter.

"Bear this in safety to thy lord, good Hassan; it is a little matter," she added, smiling, while a bright color rushed to her cheek; "but it will be precious as containing tidings of the safety of one long known and very dear to him."

"Fear not, gracious lady," replied Hassan, as, taking the letter, he concealed it in the folds of his turban; "I would sooner part with life than with this little piece of parchment which I know my master will value beyond his own. But time is speeding on, and I must away; so farewell, lady, and Hassan will pray that *hands* as well as *hearts* may be one day united, and his be no more a *divided* service."

So saying, and pressing the hem of the queen's robe to his lips, he turned and was gone.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

The Murder.

THE Spring had opened with a wealth of luxuriance unusual even in that loveliest of all lands—the *Land of Promise.* It was one gush of flowers, foliage, and sparkling waters—literally flowing with milk and honey. In and about Jerusalem, the hillsides were covered with terraced gardens redolent of sweets; every grove and tree top was alive with feathered songsters warbling their joyous notes to heaven, while small and beautiful animals disported themselves among the branches, and the air was musical with the hum of insects, more brilliant as they flashed through the sunshine than clusters of sapphires, rubies and emeralds.

To the east of Jerusalem, and separated from it by the valley of Jehoshaphat and the brook Kedron, rose Mount Olivet, a very forest of the magnificent trees from which it derives its name, just bursting into leaf

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and flower. Escaping from their rocky cells innumerable streams and torrents tumbled and leaped adown its rugged sides, as if rejoicing in the genial season, and in the beauty of which themselves formed so conspicuous a part. At its base lay the garden of Gethsemane, a perfect wilderness of sweets; for there in profusion grew the orange and the lemon trees, now covered with showers of fragrant and snowy buds, the citron and the fig tree, the scarlet pomegranate and the almond, with its clusters of pale pink blossoms, and the variegated rose of Sharon. The lofty mountain peaks, enveloped in clouds, with the sunlight shining through, seemed a chain of gems, while the fertile plain of Jericho, heaped with loveliness and fruits the face of nature. There also grew those balsam trees, so prized for their medicinal and aromatic qualities, and whose perfume is so exquisitely fragrant. The Jordan, almost concealed by its deep banks, and the willows, acacias, and other trees and shrubs which fringed its borders, flowed a long line of silver, while the delicious valley through which it ran, cool, calm, retired, and of a dewy freshness, was made vocal by the shepherd's pipe, as near some murmuring brook he sat and tended his flock.

Such were the scenes which courted the gaze of

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Judea's peerless queen; but how unconscious was she of their beauty—her spirit was again prostrate, for another of her family had fallen a victim to the ambition and jealousy of Herod. The kind, the good, but too confiding, too easy Hyrcanus, was no more—his aged head had bowed beneath the stroke of the executioner, and his gory dust was now mingling with that of the great and good who by the crimes and follies of others had been swept from the earth. The prophecy of Zerah was accomplished, and the few short months that had intervened since the reception of his letter, had witnessed the arrival and enthusiastic reception of Hyrcanus by the people of Jerusalem —the deceitful one of Herod—and his condemnation and death by the same lawless and jealous tyrant.

After the revelings had ceased at Jericho, and Herod had made Cleopatra many and valuable presents, and conducted her on her way to Egypt, he returned to Jerusalem, when, after many persuasions and artful representations, he induced Hyrcanus to leave his secure and peaceful retreat and come to him. For some time things went on peaceably and smoothly, Herod maintaining an outward show of respect, though in reality only awaiting a fitting opportunity to rid himself of the last of a line who could any way in-

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terfere with the quiet possession of his usurped dominions.

An occasion soon offered, or rather was made, by Herod: for at a feast he accused Hyrcanus of bribery and treason, inasmuch as he had received presents from the Arabian governor. Hyrcanus, in his mild and moderate manner refuted the charge, assuring the king Malchus had sent him nothing but four horses for his own especial use. Herod was perfectly aware of the fact, but being determined upon the poor old man's death, he thought this as fitting an opportunity as he could have; and putting himself into a feigned passion, used the most indecent language towards Hyrcanus, calling him traitor and liar, and without even the semblance of a trial, ordered him to immediate execution. The sentence of the Idumean upstart was put into effect, and the man who had raised him and his family from lowliness and obscurity, to wealth, honor, and finally a *throne*, was slain at his command.

This last blow fell with the force of a thunder-bolt upon the queen; her reason tottered, and a succession of fainting fits ended in a brain fever. For days and nights, her ravings were terrible to hear, her disordered imagination constantly presenting Herod with a drawn sword in the act of slaying those already

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dead, and for whom she would make the most piteous appeals. One night, after having been more than usually excited, when her shrieks sent a shudder to the heart, and her struggles were fearful to behold, she suddenly sank completely exhausted into a disturbed slumber, which was succeeded by a sleep deep and profound. It was the crisis of the disorder. Upon either side of the bed sat a leech, holding in his hand a small steel mirror, which was every few minutes held to the lips of the patient, and the faint cloud that dimmed its polished surface told that the vital spark still lingered, though scarcely perceptible in that pale, corpse-like form.

During this time—so great was the horror and indignation entertained by the Jews at this most cruel and wanton murder of their lawful prince, whose only crime was a too great mildness and moderation, his averseness to meddling with public affairs, and in allowing too much power and liberty to a low-born and ungrateful foreigner, that treasons and conspiracies were matters of daily occurrence, which, when detected, were punished by torture, the axe, and the sword.

The recovery of Mariamne was slow and tedious, and many weeks elapsed before the physicians per-

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mitted her to go abroad; but once enabled to inhale the fresh and balmy air, and enjoy the exquisite scenery, which, as she drove about in her open chariot, everywhere presented itself, her convalescence was rapid, and as the languor of bodily sickness wore away, her mind regained its usual firm and independent tone. Herod's atrocious cruelties to her family had made too deep an impression ever to be forgotten, and she now determined, come what might, that no earthly power should induce her to live on terms of familiarity with a man whose sanguinary and ferocious nature delighted in the shedding of blood; and though she anticipated the most furious wrath, and perhaps death, upon making known her resolve, she adhered with unshaken firmness to her resolution, notwithstanding Alexandra's prayers to the contrary, who, with her habitual selfishness, was much more solicitous for her own safety than her daughter's.

Since the murder of the amiable old prince, Herod had never insulted either the queen or her mother by his presence; he felt an unusual repugnance to witness the sorrow of those injured and deeply suffering women, and more particularly that of the queen, whose good opinion he prized beyond all others. It was therefore with a painful sense of his own moral

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inferiority that he encountered, after one of his iniquitous acts, the cold, calm, reproving eye of Mariamne, and as in the present instance, when her own feelings were so deeply interested, he usually absented himself until he thought their first violence had subsided.

Though both alarmed and distressed at the severity of the queen's illness, he never ventured near her apartments, but contented himself with learning from the weeping Rachel—who was at no pains to conceal her abhorrence of the crime which had thus endangered the life of her beloved mistress—the progress of her disease.

As soon as Mariamne was pronounced convalescent, the king prepared for his departure for Rhodes, whither Octavius Cæsar, after having defeated Antony at the battle of Actium, was reposing upon his laurels.

At this juncture, Herod's home affairs were in an unusually prosperous condition; yet he suffered much anxiety, being uncertain what, in the present state of things abroad, might be his fate. A firm friend of Antony, he had supplied him liberally with both men and money in his last struggle for empire, which, through the weakness and folly of Cleopatra, had ended so disastrously for the triumvir. It was scarcely probable, therefore, after such an open display of hos-

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tility, that the conqueror would extend towards him any degree of favor; indeed, both friends and enemies seemed to consider his affairs in that quarter exceedingly precarious, and it need scarcely be added, that the *latter* looked forward with joy and exultation to the prospect of his being stripped of his dominions by him who was now *master* of the world.

Herod, though devoured by a secret anxiety, determined, with his usual fearlessness, to sail for Rhodes, and learn at once his fate from Cæsar. He trusted that, however incensed, he should be able to mollify his anger by his representations, by transferring his friendship from Antony to himself, and by his presents; he placed also much faith in his usual good fortune, and in the oracles promulged at Delphos in his favor, which he had caused to be transmitted to Jerusalem. Having arranged the affairs of his kingdom with judgment and ability, he committed the care of every thing to his brother Pheroras; removed his mother and sister from the palace, to Massada, and Alexandra to Alexandrium, leaving orders for the queen, as soon as her health permitted a removal, to be conveyed to the same place; he then left his treasurer, Joseph, and Sohemus, of Itrurea, to take care of the latter fortress; he also charged them, if any mischief should

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befall him, to slay both his wife and her mother, and preserve the kingdom for his brother, Pheroras, and his sons. He then, with a large retinue and a cargo of valuable presents, sailed away to Rhodes, whither the curses of the greater part of his oppressed and unwilling subjects followed him.

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CHAPTER XIX.

Herod and Mariamne.

Herod was successful with Cæsar beyond his most sanguine expectations. The emperor was so much flattered by his professions, and the artful turn which he gave to things, that he not only restored his diadem, which he had laid aside when he entered his presence, but procured his crown to be more firmly settled upon him than ever.

After he had sworn allegiance to Octavius, as he had before done to Antony, he departed for Ptolemais, where he entertained Cæsar as he was going out of Syria into Egypt, with royal magnificence, bestowing presents upon the army, and providing him with every thing that was wanting in passing through the desert, so that they lacked neither water nor wine; he moreover presented Cæsar with eight hundred talents of gold, a sum which he could by no means afford, and

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which was wrung from the wants and miseries of the wretched people over whom he ruled with such unrelenting sway.

Herod, triumphing in his great and unexpected success, returned joyfully home, meditating upon what would be his probable reception from the queen. Having banished every unpleasant occurrence from his own mind, he hoped that Mariamne had done the same, and that after so long a separation she would meet him with some degree of confidence and affection. Buoyed up with these fallacious hopes, he proceeded at once to Alexandrium, where the queen then was, with her mother, living more like a prisoner of state than a free sovereign. Having ascertained which were her apartments, he entered without ceremony, and being really overjoyed at seeing once more his passionately beloved wife in recovered health and beauty, was about to embrace her, when, with a manner calm, cold, and dignified, Mariamne waved him from her. He stood for a moment rebuked, before the majesty of purity and goodness. Not a shade of anger was visible upon the beautiful face he was gazing upon so intently; it was cold and placid as an icy lake, and looked as if every warm and gushing feeling had been forced back to the heart from whence

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they sprang, and frozen there. Herod's fascinated gaze still continued to dwell upon the queen, and his angry passions were beginning to rise, when, feeling assured that any display of violence would only sink him still lower in her esteem, he curbed his temper, and assuming an air of haughty indifference, entered into a narration of his interview with Octavius—of the entire success which had attended his expedition —of his triumphs, and the high esteem in which he was held by the emperor. This was told with an air of pride and arrogance, as if he were indebted to his merits alone for the favor and distinction with which he had been treated, and to impress upon his listener how important was his friendship to Cæsar.

Mariamne sat silent, and vouchsafed neither comment nor question.

"Hast thou heard me?" he at length asked, "and is not thy soul filled with gladness at the power and glory of thy lord and husband?"

"The news of thy defeat would have been the most grateful tidings that could have greeted mine ears, or those of the people of Judea," replied the queen, quietly.

"I see," said Herod, his fiery passions now all let loose, "I see thou art determined I shall slay thee;

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dost know thou hast spoken treason, and hast forfeited thy life? Yet I would not stain my sword with a woman's blood, and that woman my wife."

"I pray thee baulk not thine appetite. The name of wife I fling from me, and trample it beneath my feet, and henceforth my person shall be as widely separated from thee as my heart."

"Ha! sayest thou so? Then thou hast sealed thine own fate, pronounced thine own doom! A prisoner in the subterraneous chambers of this palace, thou shalt never emerge from thence until thy stubborn will bends in submission to mine."

"Wretched man! what demon gave thee a heart so black and foul to devise and execute mischief? repent of these thine evil thoughts, or the strong arm of the Lord will overtake thee and punish thine iniquities."

"Thou art the prettiest preacher," said Herod, mockingly, "and one that a man would be right well pleased to hear; where dost intend to set up thy tabernacle?"

"Where thou, I fear, will never enter," replied the queen, raising her large, melancholy eyes to heaven.

A dark, painful smile rested on Herod's countenance at these words; he pondered with a thoughtful and abstracted air, plucking unconsciously the clus-

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tering blossoms that sent their sweet breath through the apartment, and strewing them at his feet. After pondering thus, he addressed the queen in a grave, steady voice.

"I know that thy proud spirit fears neither death nor imprisonment, nay, that it rather courts the former, as believing it will free thee from fetters, which, instead of silken, thou hast made by thy perversity chains of iron. If it were only to thwart thy vain longings, and wish to rid thyself at any cost of my presence, thou shalt live;—yes—live to feel the love which thou hast so openly despised, has at length changed to a hatred bitter as thine own, but which, instead of giving thee that liberty thou so anxiously desirest, shall make thee a mere slave to my pleasures, until thy rebellious spirit, crushed, broken, and completely subdued, thou shalt grovel at my feet, and with tears of agony and uplifted hands, plead for that name and place which, with the insolence of thy haughty race, thou hast now rejected."

The queen listened apparently unmoved to this tirade, and then said quietly, "The lion of Judah crouches not to the royal tiger, much less to the hungry jackall."

The sword of Herod leaped from its sheath, as if

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about to immolate the bold and daring woman who stood before him; but the look of quiet and unutterable scorn with which she regarded him, and her fearless self-possession, turned its point to the floor instead of to her heart.

"Witch! sorceress!" he exclaimed, "what power is it that stays my hand, and prevents my sending thy soul to keep company with thy accursed race?"

"Thou hast forgotten I am to *live* a monument of thy *tender mercies.*"

"Ay! and thou hadst better prepare to bear them courageously," answered Herod, savagely, as he strode from the room.

Mariamne sat for some time in deep thought. She perceived her situation was desperate, and felt assured that sooner or later she would fall a sacrifice to Herod's lawless passions; this, however, did not prevent her pursuing the course she had marked out—torture, death, anything was preferable to a life led with him, a life of caresses and fondness one hour, and groundless jealousy and threats of vengeance the next. With a short and earnest prayer for direction and guidance, where alone it can be found, she resumed her usual employments, resolving quietly and fearlessly to abide the end.

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CHAPTER XX.

Envy, Hatred, and Malice.

After Herod's return to Jerusalem, he caused his family to be brought from their respective strongholds, and again lodged in the palace. This arrangement was one of unmingled regret to the queen, as it rendered her liable to the frequent visits of Herod, and the intrusions of his family, for whom she entertained the most perfect abhorrence.

With the selfish and ambitious Alexandra it was far different; though hating the king—by whom she had been twice so deeply bereaved—and despising his family, she had the art to conceal her sentiments within her own breast, seldom allowing them to appear except when her temper, which was violent and imperious, mastered her judgment. Gladly, therefore, did she return to Jerusalem, as affording a wider sphere to her intrigues, which, indeed, she had begun at Alexandrum, having, in expectation of

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Herod's death or imprisonment by Octavius, tampered with Sohemus, the commander of that fortress, whom, by flattering words and liberal presents, she brought completely over to her interests, insomuch that he at length discovered, both to the queen and herself, all Herod's injunctions, particularly those relating to themselves.

So great was her indignation while listening to this recital, that it is probable if the king had been any where within reach, she would at once have taxed him with his treachery—a proceeding which would have cost her dear, and Sohemus his life.

Finding that Herod, instead of being punished as she hoped, was about to return, and with increased power and dignity, she desisted from her intrigues, and smothered her resentment, but she still looked forward to the time—which she determined to help on by every secret means in her power—when his rule would cease, and herself and Mariamne be exalted in his stead.

Subsequent to Herod's stormy interview with the queen, he departed to visit his mother and sister at Massada, and after their greetings were over, recurred to the subject uppermost in his mind, viz: his meeting with Mariamne; her cold and disdainful reception

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of him, and her expressed determination of never again living with him as his wife. When Cypros and Salome found Herod in this temper of mind towards his wife—for the weak mother was constantly wrought upon by her daughter—they thought they had now a most excellent opportunity of exercising their hatred against her, and provoking the king to still greater wrath, by telling long stories of her light conduct at Alexandrium: how she was seen walking in the gardens with Sohemus, laughing and talking with him in the most familiar manner, and some of the Roman officers as well. These slanderous tales were without any foundation, fabricated by Salome, but they produced the effect she desired, and the king's anger burned with tenfold violence against the innocent object of these gross falsehoods, poisoning his mind against her, and making him ready to believe any charge, however monstrous.

"I have left orders for the queen and her mother to return to the palace," he at length said; "thou canst, when there, exercise a general supervision over both without appearing to do so; though fair and plausible, I place but little dependence upon Alexandra's good will; but remember what thou doest must be done quietly, I will have no more contentions and out-

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breaks; such wranglings amongst my nearest relations keep my mind in a constant state of irritation, unfitting it in a great measure for the exercise of public affairs."

"And who is it that causes so much contention?" questioned Salome; "is it not the queen and Alexandra, more especially the former, who is continually remarking upon the meanness of our birth, and expressing her sorrow in being allied to a family so low and vulgar?"

Herod bit his lip as he answered, "They have ever been a haughty, overbearing race, priding themselves upon their descent from the Maccabees; but thank the gods, all of the male line are out of the way, and as for the two women,"—with a grim smile—"it shall go hard but I will manage them."

"Alexandra may, perhaps, be kept under some kind of restraint, for she is wary and cautious, and so great is her selfishness, that I verily believe she would not lift a finger to save her best friend, if by so doing it would compromise herself; but with the queen it is entirely different; she possesses more spirit, firmness, and determination than would serve a dozen such; the wonder is, how she was ever induced to marry thee. I always thought"—with a sneer, for so ma-

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licious was her disposition that even where she pretended to love, she delighted to inflict pain—"her mother must have made use of enchantments to bring it about."

"I wish, with all my soul, she had displayed the same firmness then she has since; it would have saved me many a bitter hour; but Jewish maidens have no idea of rebelling against parental authority, whatever they may do against their husband's."

"Thou hast ever been infatuated with this woman, and hast only to thank thine own fond folly, which has allowed her to get so completely the ascendancy."

"Was it ever before heard in Jerusalem of a queen's refusing to obey the lawful commands of her husband, and estranging herself entirely from him?"

"Nor shall mine," replied Herod, starting from his seat; "she shall be mine—mine by her own free will, or the lowest dungeon in the palace shall receive her dainty form, there to rot and perish."

"Better the poisoned cup or the sword of the executioner," whispered Salome.

"Ay," answered Herod, "that would be the quicker way, and with ordinary persons by far the more terrible; but I have every reason to believe that she would rather welcome death than shrink from it."

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"Yes, death, imprisonment, anything rather than queen of Judea, if the throne must be shared with thee."

"True, most true; yet I love this cold, disdainful woman, who scorns me with an intensity of passion unaccountable to myself; and the thought of harming her, of looking upon her lifeless form, her beautiful face, from which the animating principle has been violently wrenched, sends a shudder to my heart, which, school myself as I will, I cannot overcome."

A contemptuous smile curled Salome's lip, but she made no remark, and Herod, bidding her prepare as soon as possible for a change of abode, departed.

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CHAPTER XXI.

Salome and Ben Israel.

Time passed as it ever does, whether on swift and downy pinions, or in slow and measured flight, and still pursues its undeviating course, nor stops to mark the fearful events which roll up from its dark and mysterious womb.

Thus it passed in Herod's palace, and each moment swept into the abyss was hastening events to their final consummation.

Steady to her purpose, Mariamne refused all intercourse with the king, except what ordinary courtesy required, rarely leaving her apartments, and never mixing with the gay and frivolous throng by whom she was surrounded.

Day by day, goaded on by Salome, Herod, jealous and suspicious, became more evilly disposed towards his beautiful consort, and her calm and determined refusal to live with him on any but the most distant terms, added fuel to the flame; yet he could not re-

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solve to commit any deed of violence, for he felt too truly that of the two he would be the greater sufferer; thus halting between the wish to punish and the fear of entailing upon himself everlasting pain and regret, his mind was kept in a constant state of irritation, which rendered him more fierce and intractable than ever.

Salome, who saw and despised what she termed his weakness, and whose hatred of the queen had arrived at that pitch which could be satisfied with nothing short of her death, resolved upon a plot to bring it about, and leave its accomplishment to circumstances, well knowing that in the king's present irritable state, affairs must necessarily, before long, come to a crisis. Having arranged in her own mind her plan of proceeding, the next thing was to discover if the person on whom depended its accomplishment could be bribed to her wishes. This was the king's cup-bearer. Sending for him to her presence, she began to question him regarding her brother's health, expressing her indignation that the queen, by her rebellious conduct, should cause him so much anxiety. To these preliminary remarks the man returned cautious answers, and then remained silent, as if waiting either to hear something more or be dismissed. Salome was at a

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loss how to proceed; to compromise herself with the cup-bearer, who had Herod's ear at all times, and possessed considerable influence with him, until she had him completely in her own power, was not to be thought of; she looked at his stolid countenance, and the sinister and grasping expression of his eyes, as they rolled restlessly around the apartment, settling upon every article of expensive luxury, as if he longed to appropriate it to himself.

Salome understood his character in a moment, and she now recollected that avarice was his besetting sin; he could be bribed to any deed, however heinous, and she hesitated no longer.

"Ben Israel," she began, "I have need of thy service; it is a small matter, but if thou comply with my request, a talent of pure gold shall be thy reward."

The small black eyes of the cup-bearer emitted a gleam of most unholy light as he replied:

"Thy slave awaits thy commands."

"And art ready to execute them?"

"If it lieth in my power."

"Listen then," pursued Salome, "treasure in thy memory what I am about to say to thee, and be ready to act upon it when an opportunity offers."

Ben Israel laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed his head until it nearly touched the floor.

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"Thou knowest there happen frequent altercations between the king and queen, owing to the unseemly conduct of the latter; it will be my business to find out when anything of the kind occurs again, I will apprise thee of it, and thou must then go to the king, and tell him the queen has been persuading thee to assist her in preparing for him a love potion, and if he appears greatly disturbed, and wishes to know what it is, thou must tell him the queen has the potion, and only desired thee to give it to him; but if, on the contrary, he appears indifferent, say no more about it, and I will take care that no injury befals thee."

The cup-bearer asked no questions. Avarice had so completely hardened his heart that he cared little for the consequences which might follow this act of perfidy and falsehood: he considered himself as merely an instrument in the hands of the worthless woman who employed him, while all the responsibility would devolve upon her; his only anxiety was for his safety and his promised reward, and being assured of both, he experienced no scruples in performing the part assigned him, merely remarking:

"It is a somewhat dangerous experiment—but a talent of gold—it is worth the risk."

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CHAPTER XXII.

The Torture.

For putting her nefarious project into execution, an opportunity soon offered itself, even sooner than Salome had anticipated. It was the heat of the day, and Herod had retired to his apartment and thrown himself upon a couch to rest. As he lay musing, he bethought him to send for the queen, and try if he could not break down the icy barrier which lay between them, for as yet he had not put his threat in execution of immuring her in a dungeon.

After a little time Mariamne appeared, looking beautiful as the marble Venus which adorned the apartment, and as cold. The king gazed on her with looks of admiring fondness, desiring her to take a seat beside him.

Mariamne took no notice of the request, but stood looking out of the window, apparently absorbed in

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contemplating the varied and delightful prospect which met her eye.

Herod waited a few minutes, and then repeated the request.

"Hast thou anything to say to me?" she asked, still retaining her position near the window; "I have left my mother and children in my apartment, and wish to return to them."

"I am jealous of these children, Mariamne," he replied, "they monopolize all thy tenderness—how is it, that loving them so intensely, thou art indifferent to their father?"

"Because," replied Mariamne, "though mixed with a less pure stream, the blood of my ancient line flows in their veins. They have been nurtured at my bosom, brought up at my knee; they are innocent, loving, affectionate, and have never intentionally caused me a moment's distress or pain; whilst thou," she added, looking steadily and fearlessly at him, "hast murdered my nearest relatives, my best friends; and with thy drawn sword at my heart—canst tell how often?—threatened me with a similar fate."

It were hard to paint the diabolical expression which settled on Herod's countenance during this speech; it was the embodiment of every evil passion, and

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expressed the ruthless determination of a heart steeped in blood and crime.

Salome, in the meanwhile, was not idle. One of her spies, whose business it was to watch in a particular passage, hiding himself behind the massive pillars which led to the royal apartments, brought intelligence that he had seen Herod's confidential eunuch come out of the summer parlor, where Herod was reposing, and proceed to the queen's apartments; that he remained in the antechamber but a few moments, and then left, followed shortly after by Mariamne, whom he ushered into Herod's presence.

This satisfied Salome, who immediately sent for the cup-bearer, and after giving him farther instructions, bade him be in readiness to perform the part she had designed him, in case his services were required. She then glided along the passage, and encountered Herod just issuing from his chamber, his face distorted by rage and a desire of vengeance.

"This looks prosperous, looks as if my task would not be very difficult," thought the fiend; then catching the king's arm as he endeavored to pass her:

"My dear brother,"—with a face of concern—"what is the matter—has anything happened? Thy looks alarm me."

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"Salome," he said, in a voice hoarse with passion, and at the same time seizing both of her hands, and pressing them tightly between his own, "Salome, I am despised, contemned, insulted, my love scorned and rejected; my person held in abhorrence, and my crown and sceptre trampled under foot. Now tell me, my sister, what punishment does such insolence deserve?"

"Death, assuredly, for such offences come under the head of treason; but who in all thy realm has dared thus to treat thee?"

"Who, but my dutiful and loving queen. By the sceptre which I wield, I will make her an example to all disobedient wives, as did Ahasuerus, Vashti."

"She undoubtedly deserves that thou shouldst do so, and unless her haughty and contumacious spirit is brought down, the palace will ever be a scene of contention, filled with plots, schemes, and intrigues; but here comes thy cup-bearer," whom she had secretly notified, "his looks are troubled."

The pair seated themselves upon a stone bench in the passage, and silently awaited the approach of Ben Israel. The man prostrated himself at the feet of Herod and kissed the hem of his robe.

"Well!" asked the king, roughly, "what boon is

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it thou wouldst crave; whose head is to be taken off that thou mayest appropriate his riches?"

"Will my lord the king pardon his slave; it is none of these things he wants, but to make known to my lord that the queen is desirous to give him a *love potion*, which she wishes to have mixed with his drink; but as thy slave does not know the nature of the composition, nor what effect it might have, he thinks it the safest course for both the king and himself to make the matter known."

Now, in those days, what were not unfrequently called *love potions*, were in reality subtile poisons, and either dispatched the patient at once, or kept him lingering on for months—according to the pleasure of the person who administered it—a prey to the most horrible sensations, which yet, from their undefined nature, it was impossible accurately to describe. None knew the effects of these compounds better than Herod, and his wrath was therefore terrible when told that Mariamne had prepared one for him.

"Bring the traitress forth!" he shouted, "and her favorite eunuch, Hafiz; he shall be put to the torture; for well do I know that nothing good or bad is done without his knowledge and assistance."

His commands were instantly obeyed, Salome and

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her brother Pheroras going for the queen, while one of Herod's guards went for Hafiz.

When the king burst from his chamber with such frantic violence, Mariamne retreated through an opposite gallery to her own apartments, her heart filled with bitterness and her cheek burning with indignation, at the outrages to which she was constantly subjected.

"What has happened to discompose thee thus?" demanded Alexandra, with more of severity than sympathy in her tone. "Hast thou again been contending with thy husband, and setting his commands at defiance?"

"Can it be possible thou still desirest thy daughter to live on terms of familiar confidence with Herod—to clasp the hand stained with a son's and father's blood? Oh, most unnatural! most horrible! my very flesh creeps when I hear his footsteps, and at his touch the blood curdles and freezes round my heart, casing it in adamant. No, my mother, so repulsive, so utterly abhorrent to every feeling of my nature is that man, that were I to choose between his bosom and the block, my head should roll beneath the glittering axe, rather than for one instant to repose upon that false and inhuman heart."

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"Misjudging, foolish, and headstrong woman, thinkest thou that my detestation of Herod is not great as thine; that his insatiate cruelty towards those dearest to me, does not rankle deeply and with an ever-present memory in my heart? But what would it profit me, by a continually irritating conduct, to make him still farther my enemy? No; though it cost me an effort, and a desperate one, I dissemble, and when in his presence, by my cordial treatment appear to have forgotten the past. My life is still dear to me, and I will not endanger it by exciting either his suspicions or his displeasure; and thou wouldest act more wisely in following my example, than in contending for a freedom which, under a despotic monarchy, thou canst never attain."

The queen was prevented answering by the entrance of Salome and Pheroras, who informed her they had been sent by Herod to conduct her to his presence.

"That were an unnecessary piece of etiquette, which I can very well dispense with," she replied, disdainfully. "The business must be urgent to induce the king to send messengers whom he knows to be so very loving."

"It *is* urgent," responded Salome, with a look of malice which might have belonged to a demon, "and

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thou mayest yet find there are messengers even *more loving* than those whom thou now so insolently scornest."

"Thou wilt be pleased to leave this room, where thy presence is never welcome," replied the queen, "and tell thy brother I am not a slave to do his bidding, but a princess sprung from a proud and royal line, who, fearless of circumstances, consults her own dignity rather than a tyrant's will."

Without answering, save by a glance at her brother, so peculiar that it attracted the notice of Alexandra, she, followed by Pheroras, immediately quitted the apartment, and it need scarcely be added, that in her detail of this interview to the king, it lost none of its bitterness.

More inflamed than ever by Salome's artful representations, his anger knew no bounds, and as Mariamne was not present, it fell with tenfold weight upon the unfortunate Hafiz, who, pale and trembling, stood guarded by a soldier in one corner of the apartment.

"Wretch," he said, in a tone that sounded more like the hissing of a serpent than the voice of a man, "what is this potion, this damnable compound, the queen has been preparing, and trying to bribe or persuade my cup-bearer to infuse into my drink?

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Speak at once, for I know thou art privy to everything going on in thy mistress's apartments. Speak, I say, and truly, or my sword shall cleave thy head from off thy shoulders."

The last words were spoken slowly, and in a low, husky tone of voice, but each one was dwelt upon with an emphasis and expression which seemed diabolical.

Hafiz was no coward; but he knew when Herod was excited to his present pitch of madness, whether innocent or guilty, there was little hope of the accused escaping punishment. Unconscious of the foul crime charged upon the queen, and not knowing how he had offended, or what the king's words meant, he knew not what to reply, but stood with dilated eyes, expanded nostrils, and a face blanched to the hue of death.

"Away with him to the torture," vociferated Herod; "and mark me, use the one which will force, not only his voice, but his tongue from his mouth."

It was in vain the unfortunate Hafiz begged to be heard, to be made acquainted with his crime. Herod turned a deaf ear to his entreaties, and he was led away between a file of soldiers to be punished for an unknown crime.

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Arrived at the chamber consecrated to the cruelest and most diabolical of all purposes, he was informed of his offence, and desired, if he wished to escape the horrors preparing for him, to make a full and ample confession. The eunuch shuddered, and large drops of perspiration gathered on his forehead as he beheld the different instruments of torture that were to tear and lacerate his flesh, and wrench every limb from its socket. He gazed on them with a wild and vacant stare, and as the officials began to strip the garments from his person, terror completely mastered him, and uttering a deep groan, he fell insensible on the floor.

The leech, who was always present on such occasions, administered the usual remedies, and in a few moments the wretched man opened his eyes, but looking round with a convulsive shudder, he again closed them.

At this juncture Herod entered the gloomy and revolting chamber, and seeing the man lying upon the floor, imagined he had already undergone the sentence.

"Has he confessed?" he demanded.

"My lord the king, he has not yet suffered, but has only fainted from fright."

"Raise him up, then, and prepare him for the first

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stage," said the merciless tyrant, "and if that does not force the secret from him, we will resort to the pulleys and the screws."

The executioners seized him, and began to do their office, when, with the strength of desperation, he broke from them, and fell prostrate at the king's feet.

"Mercy, my lord the king! mercy! I am innocent of the crime charged upon me,—I know nought of it; the queen never spoke to me of any compound or potion to be prepared for my lord the king. It is a vile conspiracy fabricated for the destruction of my royal mistress, by those who hate, and wish her all evil! Believe it not, my lord, oh, believe it not!"

"Wretch," said the enraged monarch, "darest thou deny that which my sister and cup-bearer so confidently affirm? If thou dost not this moment confess thine and the queen's guilt, every limb shall be torn asunder in thy miserable carcass."

Hafiz rose from his kneeling posture, and stood before Herod with a countenance pale, indeed, but resigned to undergo whatever human nature could bear. He saw his doom was sealed, that there was no way of escape except by criminating his beloved and innocent mistress. Hafiz was the most faithful and attached, with the exception of Rachel, of all

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Mariamne's servants. He was at once a wise counsellor and devoted though humble friend, and in all her difficulties and dangers was ever consulted by the queen. It was he who, when Sohemus had weakly informed Alexandra and herself of Herod's commands to have them slain in case he did not return from Cæsar, advised her to guard the knowledge of this secret from the king, lest it should turn to the destruction of all three. Without, therefore, replying to any farther interrogation, otherwise than by maintaining his own and the queen's innocence, he resolutely awaited his fate, and for some time he bore the tortures inflicted without uttering a groan.

The king, who was gloating over his suffering, seeing his courage and inflexibility, ordered a torture infinitely more severe to be applied, and as the limbs of the wretched man cracked and cranched, as they were alternately compressed and wrenched apart, his agony became unendurable, and with a yell of despair he bade the executioners desist from their hellish work, and he would confess all he knew.

The men looked at Herod, who signed to them to loosen the instruments. "And now," said he, as soon as the patient was in a measure relieved, "thou wilt

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make thy confession before thou art taken from thy *pleasant* bed."

With his eyes closed, and the blood oozing from various parts of his lacerated body, while his voice was so feeble the king was obliged to bend over him to catch the words, he related what had passed between Sohemus and the queen, adding, "this is one reason, doubtless, why she is so opposed to my lord the king, but that my royal mistress has ever plotted against his life, is, I know, untrue; at least," added the poor wretch, dreading a second infliction of the torture, "if she has, I am not in her confidence."

As Hafiz proceeded with his narration, Herod's countenance resembled the heavens, as the dark clouds roll over them foretelling the approaching storm.

"Traitor, false and faithless!" he exclaimed, while every feature worked with passion, and his eyes emitted that peculiar and baleful light which was ever the precursor of some foul and terrible deed, "Thy head shall answer for thy treachery. Yes, it is plain that to enjoy undisturbed her paramour's society, my faithless consort prepared a mixture which she was in hopes would rid her for evermore of a husband, and ties which she finds it impossible otherwise to

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break. Give that miserable wretch a cordial," (to the physician,) "let him be carried to his chamber, and properly attended to, in case he should be again wanted."

"And you," (to a young centurion,) "go to the house of Sohemus, and"—making a sign with his sword across the neck of one of the soldiers—"and see that my orders are speedily executed—go!"

And thus, like his predecessor, Joseph, for lack of discretion, and a fair woman's smile, perished Sohemus, governor of the fortress of Alexandrum."

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CHAPTER XIII.

The Arrest.

The court convened by Herod for the trial of the beautiful and unfortunate Mariamne, had assembled. The hall of justice, so imposing in its severe and simple magnificence, was crowded by every age and sex, upon whose faces were depicted a breathless and intense interest.

Herod's charges against the queen were both intemperate and malicious, and it was evident to those who were to judge her that her death was predetermined.

Mariamne, in her interview with the king, had solemnly declared her innocence. The story of the poisoned cup she declared to be an invention of Salome's, who was constantly plotting evil against her, and ardently desired her death; that Ben Israel's testimony carried falsehood upon its very face, as he at first declared she had desired his assistance in preparing the potion, and afterwards that he was only to

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administer it. As to Sohemus, she acknowledged he had been induced by persuasions and presents to confide to her mother and herself the gloomy secret, which from several circumstances they more than suspected; but that there had existed any warmer feeling than friendship between the governor and herself, she utterly denied.

The voice of truth is all-powerful, and the calm and noble bearing of the queen, so free from passion and excitement, brought conviction even to Herod's prejudiced mind; he regarded her earnestly, and then said:

"If it be my pleasure to overlook the *offence* thou hast meditated against me, wilt thou return to thy allegiance as a wife?"

"I have meditated no wrong against thee, and that thou knowest right well; the punishment of thine iniquities, I leave to a just and righteous God. I owe thee no allegiance, for thy crimes and thy cruelties have severed every tie between us. I repeat, thou art utterly abhorrent to my soul, and I would rather suffer the death thou art preparing for me, than live subjected to the influence of thy unhallowed passions."

"Insolent as treacherous! thy vain and inconstant

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heart is ever wandering after forbidden objects, and at this moment is bleeding for the death of thy minion, Sohemus."

"Thou dost not believe what thou affirmest," replied Mariamne, "and they who accuse me of such things, judge me by their own impure and wretched hearts. Severed by ambition and policy from the one who, from childhood, I had been taught to consider as my affianced husband, all others are beheld with indifference; my heart lies buried in the past, it lives not either in the present or the future."

Though greatly irritated by the queen's calm and steadfast refusal again to live with him, preferring even death to such an alternative, her dignified manner and quiet disavowal of the calumnies brought against her, produced a favorable impression on Herod's mind, and when he left her presence, he was meditating a milder punishment for what he still persisted in calling her offences, than imprisonment or death.

Pondering these thoughts, he proceeded to his mother's apartments, to talk over with her what would be the wisest course to pursue. Herod had no very profound respect for her judgment, but he had much for her kindness of heart, and he felt assured that now as ever she would lean to the side of mercy

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—which he felt inclined to do himself—for so passionately did he love Mariamne, that he dreaded, by inflicting upon her a severe punishment, he should entail upon himself everlasting remorse and regret. Much to his annoyance, upon entering his mother's room, he found her surrounded by Salome, Phararos, and several of her near relations and friends, talking in earnest and subdued tones, and evidently much excited.

Herod paused upon the threshold to remark the group, but as soon as he was perceived, each one started forward to offer congratulations upon his escape from the threatened danger. A cold salutation was the only notice vouchsafed; but ere half an hour had elapsed—by the artifices of Salome, the representations of her friends, and the tears of Cypros, who believed entirely in the queen's guilt—all the worst feelings of his nature, which had in some degree subsided, were once more aroused.

"My son," said Cypros, who rarely advocated extreme measures, "imprison that woman in one of the fortresses in some distant part of thy kingdom. This time her wicked intentions have been frustrated, her next effort may be more successful."

"Yes," responded Salome, "we all know how both

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she and Alexandra hate the king and all belonging to him; depend upon it, this is only a foretaste of what will happen if she is left to pursue her machinations; my brother must choose between two alternatives, of dying like a dog himself, or of putting this imperious queen in an asylum so *secure* that she will *never again* be able to plot farther mischief."

At these words, Herod's gloomy features were lighted up with a livid fire of hatred and of vengeance. The struggle was a fearful one, between his desire to inflict signal punishment, and the nervous horror which seized him when he thought of Mariamne, slain by his order. It seemed as if the Almighty, to punish him for his crimes, had given him a foretaste of the torments he would be compelled at no distant day to endure.

The conclave remained long in session before it could be determined in what mannner the queen was to be dealt with. Cypros was for moderate measures, but nothing less than the death of the Jewish princess would satisfy Salome and her party, and so strongly did they urge its necessity, that Herod, whose mind had undergone a complete change in this interview, yielded his consent. It was then determined, that for appearance sake, the king should summon a court,

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and Mariamne take her trial, the judges being previously instructed that the queen's condemnation was determined upon.

This day had been one of turbulence, of violence, and of crime; the whole palace was in a state of agitation; in every gallery and corridor, knots of persons were gathered together, conversing in whispers, their pale and terror-stricken faces looking as if the blood which used to mantle there, had congealed in horror round their hearts.

Day was closing in, the long, clear twilight deepening fast into night, and a few dark clouds, whose rims were still tinged with a deep orange and purple hue, scudded before a light breeze, betokening an approaching storm.

Suffering physically as well as mentally, the queen had cast herself in utter abandonment on a couch, and pressing her clasped hands tightly over her burning and throbbing brow, lay as still and motionless as if already consigned to the grave so rapidly preparing for her. She had just left her mother's chamber, and instead of receiving the tenderness and sympathy she so much required, had been assailed by that unprincipled and violent woman, with threats and reproaches, at what she termed her insolence and ingratitude to-

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wards the king, whom she styled their best friend and benefactor. This was said for effect, and that it might reach Herod's ears, hoping by this deceit to ward off his anger from herself, caring little, in her supreme selfishness, how heavily it fell upon her daughter.

Mariamne's heart swelled almost to bursting as she listened to these unjust and uncalled-for reproaches, uttered, as they were, before friends and enemies, who, in the state of agitation and excitement pervading the palace, and to learn farther tidings of the disastrous events which had that day occurred, were passing promiscuously in and out of Alexandra's room.

Rachel stood near her mistress, and her flashing eyes rested fiercely upon the unnatural mother.

"Let us go, lady," whispered she, "this is no place for thee."

"Thou sayest truly, maiden; like a wounded doe I am hunted to the death; but to be thus reviled and upbraided by my mother, for whom I have sacrificed a whole life, oh, it is more that I can bear."

"Thy mother was never worthy of such a daughter," said Rachel, angrily; "but come away, lady e'er I say something disrespectful."

The queen rose.

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"Farewell! my mother," going towards her, "may thy sleep be more peaceful than thy unkindness will have made thy daughter's. I forgive thy harshness, and pray heaven thy injustice may not recoil upon thine own head;" and without waiting for a reply, she leaned upon the arm of her handmaiden, and left the room.

Stretched upon her couch, Mariamne gave way to all the agonizing and bitter feelings which thronged about her heart; Rachel knelt by her side, and her tears fell fast and thick as she beheld the deep despair depicted on the pallid and haggard features of the queen.

At this moment a loud noise, as of the trampling of many feet, was heard in the antechamber; Rachel sprang to the door, and beheld the governor of the palace, accompanied by a centurion and file of soldiers. Terrified by this sight, her usual presence of mind forsook her; she uttered a loud shriek, and flying back to her mistress, clasped her in her arms, as if to protect her from the perils of which she scarcely divined the nature.

The governor entered the queen's apartment, he bowed low, and there was a look of deep commiseration upon his face as he presented to her a paper.

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Mariamne held out her hand, took and unfolded it. As she read, a smile of ineffable disdain sat upon her features, her eyes shone with the lustre of insulted majesty, and the blood mounted to her brow.

"Tell thy master," said she, "that this mandate fills up the measure of his iniquities—that it is the act of a tyrant, and as such I despise it."

It was an order for her imprisonment, and an announcement for her trial, which was to take place on the morrow.

The governor looked much distressed.

"I dare not disobey the king's orders, however repugnant to my feelings, and I am instructed by him to place thee in one of the prisons belonging to the palace."

"But I tell thee," said Mariamne, drawing herself up to her full height, while her eyes flashed fire, "I tell thee the walls of a prison shall never inclose the form of Mariamne."

"Say not so, I beseech thee, lady, or I shall be compelled to use force where I had hoped gentleness would succeed."

"Force!" repeated the queen, trembling with indignation, "how darest thou use such words to me; depart instantly, and take these men with thee!"

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"How willingly would I obey thee, if I durst, for my soul revolts at the office assigned me; but, gracious mistress, my head would pay the forfeit of my disobedience."

The queen gazed on the pitying countenance of the governor, and then said:

"I am wrong to visit Herod's sins upon thee. Lead on whithersoever thou wilt, I will follow."

Rachel darted forward, and seizing the queen's robe, exclaimed:

"I will go with thee to prison or to death."

"Thou hearest," said Mariamne, with a melancholy smile, "and wilt let this faithful maiden attend me?"

"I have no orders to the contrary, and am well pleased to grant thy request; and I trust, dear lady, thy imprisonment—brought about by the malevolence and hatred of those of thine enemies who have too free access to the king's ear—will be short, and all their wicked devices recoil upon their own heads."

"I thank thee, my friend, for thy kind wishes," replied the queen, deeply sighing. "Since my fatal marriage, my life has been a stormy one, blessed with but few glimpses of sunshine; and both my reason and judgment tell me, should it be taken away, the

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exchange would be to my advantage; yet," added she, shuddering, "the thought of having it violently wrenched away, taken from me by the vile and polluted hands of a common executioner, a wretch without feeling or pity, makes the flesh quiver, and the coward heart turn to ice."

"My queen, my beloved mistress," said Rachel, "indulge not in such gloomy forebodings. Herod, tyrant and despot as he is, will not dare to touch thy precious life; he learned a lesson from the furious populace upon the murder of Aristobulus, which must still be fresh in his memory, and which he will not be very apt to forget."

"We will hope for the best, at least," responded the governor; "and now, my good girl, get what things thy mistress will require for to-night, and let us begone; it is not safe for me to linger here any longer."

Almost blinded by her tears, Rachel did as she was desired, and then followed the queen, who, leaning upon the arm of the governor, trod with a firm step the dark and vaulted passages which led to her sorrowful abode. After threading for some time these intricate windings, lighted here and there by a solitary lamp, they arrived at a massive door barred with

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iron and fastened by a ponderous lock; a soldier then stepped forward, and detaching a large key from a bunch swinging at his belt, opened the door. As the damp, foul atmosphere escaped and rushed past her, Mariamne shivered with horror, and Rachel gave vent to her indignation and sorrow in no measured terms. As the queen gazed around the gloomy apartment prepared for her by Herod, dimly seen by the wan light of an inner lamp, suspended from the roof, a scornful smile crossed her features.

"It is well," she remarked, "this is the first step towards the accomplishment of the fiendish plot contrived for my destruction, and who knows but that e'er to-morrow's sun they who have brought me to this pass may witness the end of the tragedy."

"This bed," laying her hand upon a small pallet, "is hard and narrow, but the one the king's *love* is preparing for me is harder and narrower still; but there, freed from his persecutions and the treachery of Salome, I shall repose in undisturbed tranquillity—ought I not, then, to thank him for it?"

The governor was deeply affected, and kneeling at the queen's feet, supplicated her to pardon the part he had been compelled to act, and she, too wise and kind

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to attach blame where disobedience would have been certain death, willingly granted it.

Nicanor now urged upon Mariamne the necessity of obtaining some rest. "Our moral courage," he said, "depends very much upon our physical strength: when the body is sound and healthy, the mind is usually buoyant and elastic; but when the latter, for want of its usual rest or refreshment, or any other visible cause, becomes weak and languid, the former unavoidably sympathises with it—it is a law of nature which we can neither overcome nor resist; and to have the mind cool, calm, and clear, care must be taken of the casket which enshrines it."

"Ah, thou art thinking of the morrow; it will be a day of terrible excitement, but fear not for me, my friend; I have no fears for myself, for God has heretofore always proportioned my courage to my trials, and as I have never yet quailed before that bold, bad man, who is to sit in judgment upon me, neither will I now. Strong in innocence, I look to heaven for that justice denied me on earth, and defy the malice of my enemies."

Nicanor regarded with admiration the high-souled and beautiful being before him, and something very

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like a curse rose to his lips upon those whose envy, jealousy and hatred had cruelly crushed one so every way fitted to adorn her high station, and so immeasurably superior to those by whom she was surrounded.

"Kindness and sympathy are very sweet," continued the queen, as she observed the agitated and distressed countenance of the governor; "but in order to profit by thy advice, and prevent the sympathy to which I am so unused from unnerving me, I must send thee away, that by prayer and repose I may attain that perfect calmness and self-command which in a few hours I shall so much require."

Nicanor, without farther remark, respectfully saluted the royal captive, and retired; but as he double-locked the heavy door, surrounding it with a guard, his heart sank at the probable fate of the lovely and unfortunate victim which it enclosed.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

Conclusion.

Bitter, most bitter, were the queen's reflections, as, with her head drooped on her hand, she reviewed her past life and present dreary abode. A prisoner in that ancient city where her illustrious ancestors had once held undisputed sway—accused of crimes which her soul abhorred, and about to be tried for her life—how could she endure such injustice, such contumely? To-morrow! what might it not bring forth! Mariamne, spite of her heroic fortitude, shuddered as she thought, and rising in uncontrollable agitation, paced the floor of her cell.

"And it has at length come to this," she exclaimed, mentally; "and the queen of Judea, lonely and forsaken, is a prisoner within her own palace walls! Monsters of iniquity! plot, scheme, bring my royal and innocent head to the block; but remember, there

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is an arm which is never shortened, an eye which never slumbers."

A few natural tears chased each other down her pale cheek; but, as if ashamed of their indulgence, she hastily dashed them away, and with that determined energy which was one of the principal features of her character, controlled her agitation.

Rachel stood looking at her mistress. Indignation had dried the tears on her burning cheeks—she resembled a young tigress, and had she at that moment come in contact with Herod or Salome, and her strength equalled her will, their worthless lives would have been forfeited to their vengeance and their crimes. Mariamne, now perfectly calm, approached the table over which hung the iron lamp, and drawing a chair towards it, took from an embroidered case a small roll of parchment, and upon which was beautifully written the Psalms of David.

Selecting those most appropriate to her situation, she commenced reading them aloud with a pathos and fervor which caused the tears to flow plentifully down Rachel's cheeks, while her own soul, like parched and thirsty ground, drank in the words and promises of the inspired prophet. It seemed as if she had never known how precious and consoling were those divine

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songs until now. All earthly cares and sorrows were forgotten—her thoughts wafted heavenward; a holy calm diffused itself over her worn and troubled spirit, and reverently laying aside the manuscript, she sank upon her knees, and bowing her head upon her clasped hands, remained in silent meditation and prayer.

When the queen rose from her knees, every stormy passion was at rest, and her sweet face was the index of the peace which reigned within.

Assisted by Rachel, she undressed, and lay down upon her coarse and narrow couch; she sighed heavily, and then resolutely closing her eyes, soon fell into a sweet and refreshing slumber.

Watched by the eyes of affection, and completely worn out by the fearful and exciting events of the day, Mariamne's sleep was deep and profound, nor did she awaken until roused by a noise like the jingling of arms outside her prison door. She started up, and looked around with a wild and bewildered air. In an instant all the horrors of her situation rushed to her memory, and uttering a deep groan, she sank again upon her couch, covering her eyes with her hands.

Oh, that terrible awakening!—who has not at some period of their lives experienced it? When nature,

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exhausted by suffering, has been overpowered by that deep, dreamless sleep, which wraps the soul in oblivion, and gives to the body the stillness and the appearance of death—the awakening from such trance-like slumbers, who may portray!

The queen remained for a short time with her face concealed in her hands; she then withdrew them—the whole expression of that lovely face was changed, its agony had passed away, and cold, calm and impassible, she looked as if pain and suffering had never touched her.

"I will rise now," said she to Rachel, who looked with amazement at the change wrought in so brief a space; "this is to be a *gala* day," she added, bitterly, "in which the queen of Judea is to play a conspicuous part. Maiden, see that her attire be such as becomes her royal station."

Rachel assisted her mistress to rise, and then with a heavy heart, began the duties of the toilette. She had just finished arranging her magnificent hair, when the key turned in the lock; there was a pause of a few seconds, the door opened, and a slave, preceded by a centurion, entered, bearing refreshments, and placing them on the table, immediately retired.

The centurion then presented to Mariamne a note

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from the governor; it contained a few respectful lines, notifying her of the hour at which the court was to assemble, and informing her that the honor of conducting her thither was confided to him; he also mentioned, if she wished anything from her apartments, her attendant was at liberty to procure it.

When she had finished reading, the queen gave some directions to Rachel, who went out, followed by the soldier, locking the door after them. In less than half an hour she returned, bearing on her head a basket, and was admitted by the centurion, who had waited for her; the door was again locked, and the two left to themselves.

Mariamne had passed the time of Rachel's absence in praying for strength to meet with firmness whatever doom might await her, and in recommending her children to the protection of the Father of all. Drawing her chair to the table, she took up a cluster of grapes, and began to eat, desiring the maiden to partake with her, "for it may be," she said, "the last time we shall ever partake together on earth."

"Say not so, beloved lady; the king loves thee too well to touch thy precious life, he only means to frighten thee."

"Frighten me!" answered the queen, "if that is

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his object, he will be grievously disappointed. But mention him no more, maiden, his intentions will soon be unveiled; and now open the basket, and let me see if thou hast made an appropriate selection."

The damsel raised the cover, and displayed a robe of silk, blue as the summer skies, embroidered with silver flowers; a scarf or sash of the softest and finest camel's hair, with a deep border of bright flowers worked all around, and the ends fringed with silver; there was also a jeweled coronet, with ear-rings, necklace, and bracelets to match.

"That will do," as Rachel took them one by one from the basket,—"and now to array myself. See," (pointing to the hour-glass,) "one more turn, and the governor will be here."

With tearful eyes and trembling hand, Rachel commenced her duties; but, absorbed in her own thoughts, Mariamne heeded her not. When her dress was completed, the damsel held before her a mirror—she gazed long and earnestly at the beautiful reflection, and then with a deep sigh turned away. She was thinking of one whom she loved, and who loved her; of one who would have delighted to see her beauty thus arrayed—of one far away—of Zerah. Where was he now? Alas! she knew not. Since the death

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of Antony and Cleopatra all things were changed. Had they been still alive, Herod would not have dared to place her a captive within his prison walls. Since the death of his royal mistress, Zerah might have left Alexandria, gone to Rome, and entered the service of the emperor. She took from a casket his letter, opened it, and read.

"Ah!" thought she, "could he now redeem his promise! but that is impossible—events have followed each other in such quick succession, that he can learn nothing of what has transpired until after I am dead, or immured in some far-off and impenetrable fortress."

A tear trembled in her eye, she dashed it away, and stood in that gloomy and narrow prison, in appearance as much the queen of Judea as when treading the marble halls of her palace.

The last sands in the hour-glass had scarcely run out, when footsteps announced the governor's approach. He knocked at the door, and then entered. What a vision of loveliness met his view in that drear abode! How noble, how majestic, was the bearing of that ill-used and persecuted princess!

Nicanor gazed with awe and reverence—never had he witnessed, under such circumstances, such quiet self-possession.

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Mariamne read his thoughts, and remarked:

"Thou, doubtless, expected to find me plunged in grief—overcome by terror. On the contrary, thou seest I have no fears; neither has terror paralyzed me. Indignation at the injustice, the shamelessness, the ignominy with which I am treated, has in a great measure banished the natural horror of my situation, and dried up the fountain of my tears. All our actions leave their trace—some sad, others bright—on our paths. The error committed in my youth, in allying myself to Herod, has left mine dark and dreary as the tomb, and traced in tears, it may be, of blood. But let us begone; the multitude are doubtless waiting for my appearance with the same intense curiosity and eagerness with which they would look forward to any other spectacle, *amusing* or terrible, provided for them by their indulgent king."

Leaning upon the arm of Nicanor, who in low and smothered tones gave vent to his pity and indignation, Mariamne left her prison, and, preceded by an armed guard, and followed by Rachel and a few of her most faithful and attached domestics, whose stern, sad countenances evinced they were ready to peril both soul and body in her service, took her way through innumerable galleries and chambers to the

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grand and magnificent apartment so inappropriately denominated the Hall of Justice.

It was circular, of vast height and size, built entirely of marble, and lighted by an immense dome. The seats appropriated to spectators resembled those in a theatre. At the farthest extremity, raised above the mosaic floor by six marble steps, was Herod's throne, formed of Egyptian porphyry; the entire elevation upon which it stood was spread with skins of panthers, leopards, lions, tigers, thick and soft as the velvet carpets of Persia; over it was suspended a canopy of purple and gold. Statues of the most renowned legislators and philosophers of Greece and Rome were ranged round, and the marble walls were a series of sculptured pictures.

The ground floor was reserved for the judges, lawyers, witnesses, and all the paraphernalia of the court.

Herod, arrayed in his royal robes, with the crown on his head, and sceptre in his hand, was already seated on the throne; on either side of which was Cypros, Salome, Phararos, and their nearest friends and relations. Below the throne, and to the left, was a file of Roman soldiers, Herod's body guard, placed there to prevent any tumult or commotion which

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might arise amongst the spectators, and to the right, railed round by gilded bars, was a small inclosure, destined to receive those who were to experience the king's clemency, or be condemned to an ignominious punishment or death. The marble floor within the rails was spread with skins; a chair, surmounted by a coronet, was placed upon them, and the court, as well as spectators, were in a state of nervous expectation and excitement.

Presently was heard in the ante-chamber the measured tread of soldiers, then the large leaves of the principal door of entrance were flung back, and Mariamne appeared.

With her proud and beautiful head thrown back, a regal port and queenly step, she entered the court; her quick and flashing eye had taken in at a single glance the whole array, and, as still leaning upon the arm of Nicanor, she proceeded to her appointed place, her looks, full of pity, rested first upon her mother, who, deadly pale, was seated next to Cypros, and then, with unspeakable scorn, were turned upon the king.

Herod's eyes had been fixed upon a small side door, leading directly to the enclosure already described, and where it was usual for prisoners and others to

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enter. He supposed that, exhausted by all she had gone through the previous morning, and overwhelmed with terror and confusion, at her perilous situation, Mariamne would have endeavored as much as possible to screen herself from observation, and enter the court quietly and privately; when, therefore, he beheld the doors of the grand entrance, which were never used except upon great ceremonial days, thrown open, and the queen looking like a *descended goddess*, splendidly arrayed and sparkling in jewels, her brilliant eyes made more brilliant by the ineffable scorn which flashed from them, and her cheek, not wan and pale, but dyed by indignation to the hue of a rich summer sunset, Herod's fascinated gaze remained riveted in astonishment upon this beautiful and resplendent being, whose progress through the crowd of spectators resembled more a triumphal entry, than that of a criminal proceeding to the bar of justice.

Silence the most profound reigned throughout the court, as the queen advanced with a slow and dignified step, and took her seat within the rails. Looks of intense sympathy—to have expressed it openly would have incurred the king's wrath and displeasure—were directed towards her, which Mariamne returned by others of gratitude.

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With the exception of Salome's party and the parasites who surrounded the king, the Jewish princess had no enemies. Beloved and reverenced by her own people, not only as the last of a princely line, but for the firm and resolute manner in which she maintained their rights, frequently in opposition to the king, their distress and anger were boundless in witnessing her present degradation, which they believed to be owing to no fault of hers, but to the unjustifiable malice and hatred of her enemies.

Events had transpired in such quick succession, there had been no time for the expression of feeling. It was Herod's policy to allow his subjects—especially those in Jerusalem—as little time for reflection as possible, for though a tyrant and a despot, he still feared the popular fury, and dreaded an outbreak in behalf of his much-injured queen; urged on by Salome and her party, matters were therefore, in an incredibly short space of time, brought to their present crises.

The business of the court now began, and Herod preferred his charge.

With a faltering voice and ashen cheek, he accused the queen of criminal intercourse with Sohemus, commander of the fortress, where, with her mother, she had lived during his unavoidable absence, in order to

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obtain an interview with Octavius, after the downfall of Antony; and of her attempt, through the medium of his cup-bearer, to administer to him *poison*, under the name of a love-potion.

These charges were supported by the testimony of Salome, of Ben Israel the cup-bearer, and of two Roman soldiers belonging to the fortress, bribed by Salome to her purpose.

The trial went on; but from the manner of the judges, it was evident that it would terminate unfavorably for the royal prisoner.

The noble bearing and queenly appearance of Mariamne, setting, as it were, Herod's authority—of which he was weakly tenacious—at defiance, was an aggravation of her offence, and so fierce was his anger against her, that the court saw it was his intention they should pass sentence of death. To this extreme measure he had been goaded by Salome, who hinted that if he permitted a woman so proud and high-spirited to escape, after having experienced so signal a mortification, neither his person nor his throne would be safe; and moreover, that such a proceeding would be a direct implication upon the veracity of the witnesses, of whom she was the chief.

A grim smile passed over the king's features as he

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whispered Salome to be silent, and desired the court to interrogate his cup-bearer.

So sinister and revolting was this man's appearance, that a shudder ran through the assembly, and a murmer, or rather groan, evinced their disapprobation. Ben Israel raised his small, black eyes, glittering with the cunning and venom of a snake, and their sardonic expression produced upon the spectators somewhat the same effect ascribed to the basilisk. A fire like that of the damned kindled upon his swarthy and ill-omened visage, and it was evident he was prepared for any villainy—prepared to dye himself in guilt, deep and dark as the shades which would hereafter receive him.

His testimony was clear, consistent, brief; there was no faltering, no equivocation—he had been an apt and willing scholar of an unscrupulous and diabolical teacher. Few there were, nevertheless, who put any faith in his testimony, for it was known that Ben Israel was the source from whence sprang murders, tortures, and confiscations; the spoils of the miserable victims going to swell his overflowing coffers.

The queen, with a calm, unruffled countenance, upon which the color never once varied, fixed upon him a steady, searching glance; but bold as he was,

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and daring in falsehood, he yet dreaded that steadfast, penetrating eye, and kept his own averted. This fact did not pass unobserved, and when he retired, it was amidst groans and smothered execrations.

One by one these suborned witnesses gave their false evidence against their victim, urged on by the dark looks and lowering brow of Salome, and the stern and unrelenting countenance of Herod.

The evidence was then summed up, and sentence of death pronounced by a court devoted to Herod, against his innocent and lovely wife.

Not a word had fallen from the lips of this injured woman, during her afflictive trial. Unsupported by counsel, she disdained to plead her own cause against those who so ardently thirsted for her blood; she saw she had been foredoomed, and gathered up all her energies unshrinkingly to meet her fate.

When the awful sentence was pronounced, which consigned her in the bloom of youth to a violent and ignominious death, to a cold and narrow grave, to silence, darkness, and the worms, her heart throbbed violently, her frame shuddered, a mist came over her eyes, and a convulsive smile, "like moonlight on a statue," so wan, cold, and lifeless it appeared, flitted across her face. It was the *natural* triumphing over

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the *spiritual;* but the triumph was short, and the vital principle, which not even Herod's power and cruelty could extinguish, rose buoyant, as if anticipating and rejoicing in its speedy emancipation.

After the passing of the sentence, the court suggested that Mariamne should not be immediately executed, but confined in one of the fortresses belonging to the kingdom. This met the king's approbation, for, now that his vengeance was appeased by her condemnation, and his desire of punishing her about to be gratified, he experienced a degree of irresolution, and an unwillingness to inflict it, which had ever attended the acts of violence he had meditated against her. These better feelings were, however, not allowed to bring forth any fruits. Salome's implacable animosity, and her desire to rid herself of a rival she both feared and hated, lent additional eloquence to a tongue always smooth and plausible, and particularly so when advocating any cause subservient to her own ends. She represented the extreme danger of allowing a woman so popular and so much beloved, to remain alive, incarcerated within a fortress, which would necessarily give rise to conspiracies, insurrections, and tumults, in order to set her free. These arguments were conclusive, and Herod signed the death warrant of his queen.

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When Alexandra found all hopes of a pardon for her daughter were at an end, and fearing she might be involved in a similar fate, she sprang from her seat, and with her characteristic selfishness and duplicity, began to upbraid Mariamne in the hearing of all the people—crying out upon her shameless conduct, saying she had been ungrateful and insolent to her husband —that she had not made proper returns to him who had been their common benefactor, and was therefore justly punished.

After this most indecent and hypocritical display, which was intended to show her ignorance of the crimes laid to her daughter's charge, she returned to her place, amidst the loudly expressed displeasure of the audience, who condemned, in the most open manner, her unnatural and artful conduct.

Mariamne had risen when her doom was pronounced, and with a calm and dignified mien still continued to lean upon the railing. During her mother's maledictions, a cold, death-like torpor crept through her veins, her brow contracted, and a spasm as if of intense suffering distorted her countenance; she bowed her head, and covering her face with her hands, remained a few minutes as if in mental prayer, then raising that beautiful head, which had bent like a crushed

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lily to the storm, and looking with compassion upon Alexandra:

"My poor mother," she ejaculated, "the unjust reproaches thou heapest upon thy daughter will not save thyself. No! he who has spilled the blood of all our kindred will never feel secure so long as one of our race remains alive to excite his jealousy; and something tells me that ere mine is cold, he will cause thine to flow.* For me, I would die in peace with all, and from the very depths of my heart forgive thee all the evil at this or any other time thou hast done me.

"Friends and fellow-countrymen! and ye of another nation," (addressing the audience,) "an innocent and grossly calumniated woman, I die the victim of a horrible conspiracy, engendered of envy, jealousy, and hatred. Behold at the king's right hand the conspirators!" (pointing to his mother, brother, and sister,) "bribed to witness against me—those subordinates" (looking at the men who stood cowering beneath her glance) "are but their necessary and convenient tools to work out my destruction. To ye, men of Jerusalem—worshippers, as were our fathers,

* Alexandra having excited Herod's suspicions, was executed shortly after her daughter, by the tyrant's order.

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at one common altar—to ye I appeal, when this form, now instinct with life, shall be cold in the tomb, ye will judge righteous judgment, and remove from my name the stain so foully attached to it, and teach my children to reverence the name of their mother!

"Of thee, my lord and king," (turning towards Herod, and fixing her earnest, melancholy eyes upon his face,) "I take an everlasting farewell; and for this last act of thy *love*, in removing from my brow a corruptible, and placing upon it an incorruptible crown, I humbly thank thee. A sharp, quick stroke, and my freed spirit, borne by angels, will soar to the mansions of everlasting peace; there the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. But while my beatified soul is rejoicing in the company of the glorified spirits of prophets, priests, and kings, thine, raging round its earthly tenement with howlings of despair, will be tormented by a never-ending remorse —by a slow, consuming agony, which death itself will not terminate.

"Friends, whose streaming eyes witness your sympathy, and ye, my bitterest enemies, once more farewell! I die as I have lived, a free and independent Jewish princess, unstained by crime, untouched by one false or faithless act; in a corrupt and licentious

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court, surrounded by vice, assailed by temptation, my conduct has ever been pure and irreproachable.

"Jews of the seed of Abraham, over whose rights and privileges I have ever kept a watchful and jealous eye, ye have never had cause to blush for your queen —see, then, that ye do her memory justice, and let future ages know that Mariamne fell a victim—not to her own crimes—but to the crimes of others!"

THE END.

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THE PRINCE

OF

THE HOUSE OF DAVID;

OR,

THREE YEARS IN JERUSALEM,

IN THE DAYS OF PONTIUS PILATE.

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INTRODUCTION.

ADINA, the writer of the Narrative, was the only child of Manasseh Benjamin, who, though an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, was a native of the Græco-Romano city of Alexandria. His ancestor was the learned David Esdras Manasseh, one of the Septuaginta (or LXX.) appointed by Ptolemy Philadelphus in the year B. C. 277, to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew tongue into Greek. Esdras, with his companions, having accomplished this important work, was invited by the king to remain in Egypt, where he died at an advanced age holding an office of trust

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and honor. His descendants for five generations were eminent men, and shared the confidence of the rulers of Egypt, under whom they accumulated riches, which were finally inherited by Manasseh Benjamin, a man not unworthy of so eminent an ancestry. He was revered in Alexandria for his integrity, wisdom and rank, as well as for his learning and wealth, and was honored with the friendship of the Roman Pro-consul, Rufus Lucius Paulinus. His love and veneration for the land of his fathers, for the Holy City and Temple of Jehovah, were not lessened by his nativity as an Egyptian Jew: and as he had been in his youth sent to Jerusalem by his father to be educated in the laws of Moses, so he resolved that his daughter should share the same privileges, be taught as beseemed a Jewish woman, and inheritress of his name and wealth.

After a tedious journey of seventeen days by the way of Gaza, the lovely Adina at length came in sight of the walls and tower of the city of Zion. The caravan halted upon the ridge, and the Jewish travellers composing it alighted and prostrated themselves in adoration before the City of David and the mountain of Moriah, made sacred by the footsteps of Abraham. The maiden unveiled, and bowed her head with sacred awe. It was her first sight of Jerusalem —the city of her fathers, the place of her parent, which, from her earliest childhood, she had heard speak with the profoundest reverence. As she gazed upon it, she thought of Isaac, who had been bound upon an altar on yonder height, now glittering with walls overlaid with marble and gold; of Isaiah, who had been sawn asunder in the gloomy valley at her feet; of David and his glory; of Solomon and his wisdom; of the host of prophets who had trod its streets or wandered upon its hills. Rapidly her memory brought to her mind the history of the mighty past; of the sieges the city had withstood against the Assyrians, the Persians, the Egyptians, and the nations of the earth; of the carrying away into captivity of her countrymen; of the demolition of its walls and of its Temple, and its rebuilding by Ezra. But most of all, she dwelt with holy fear upon the thought that the presence of God, of Jehovah, had dwelt there.

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century after century, visibly, in unbearable fire, within the inner sanctuary of the Temple; and that there he had spoken with man, as it were, face to face. She thought also of the Ark of the Covenant, of the Tables of Stone, of Aaron's budded rod, and of the brazen serpent, which were laid up in the Temple; and her heart beat with emotion, such as she had never felt before. Lower and with more awful veneration, she bent her head in grateful reverence to Him who had so distinguished above all nations her nation—above all cities the city of her fathers and of the prophets! Then she raised her eyes in pride that she was a Jewess, and looked around proudly upon the noble landscape which, in her imagination, it seemed must be as familiar to the eyes of angels as to men, so closely had Heaven connected itself with that chosen spot.

The Arabs, her attendants, had also bowed and kneeled in the presence of the sacred towers; but it was in honor of Abraham and the patriarchs, their ancestors through Ishmael, whom they believed lay with Isaac and Jacob in sepulchres upon Mount Zion.

Adina's proud glance around was arrested by the sight of a cohort of soldiers that came galloping up the ridge from the city, with a glittering eagle carried in advance.

"The Romans! the Romans!" cried the guides; and rising from their knees they remounted in haste, and used every exertion to leave the road open to the approaching troop of horse. An Israelitish muleteer, a few rods below in the path, who could not get out of the way soon enough, was over-run and thrown to the ground, and the cavalcade swept onward to the summit of the hill, disregarding him.

The cheek of Adina paled at this sight, but it was not from fear. All her pride died away in her heart; and she forgot the glory of the past, in the sense of the present degradation. In the first exultation of her emotions at fastening her eyes upon Jerusalem, she had forgotten that the land of the prophets and of kings anointed by God, was now a conquered Roman province. But the sight of the Roman cohort brought this painful reality to her mind, and veiling her face, she was overcome by the deepest sadness.

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The troops passed her and her escort like a whirlwind of war, with ringing spurs, jangling bits, clashing shields, and the noise of the tramp of five hundred hoofs. She could no longer gaze upon the city with joy and pride. The words of Jeremiah rose to her lips:

"How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger: Is this that city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth? The Lord has cast us off from being a nation, and the name of Israel is remembered no more!"

Tears, free and bountiful, relieved the fullness of her heart, and like a true daughter of Israel, she mourned over the departed glory of her people.

Once more they rode on, winding down around a hill covered with tombs, one of which was pointed out to her by a Jewish Rabbi, under whose care she was journeying, as that of the prophet Jeremiah. Leaving this tomb on the left, they crossed a small valley, green and beautiful with groves, fountains and terraces, and thronged with a mixed multitude, both men and women, who seemed to be enjoying a promenade there outside the city walls; there were also booths arranged on one side of the shady walk, where merchants from all parts of the earth were selling. The Rabbi accounted for this concourse by informing her that they had arrived at Jerusalem on a great feast day. Avoiding this multitude they moved on their way to the right, and ascended a low eminence, from which Jerusalem, in another point of view, burst upon them in all the splendor of its still unconquerable magnificence; for with all its vicissitudes of misfortune, in wars, sieges and desolation, the Jerusalem of the Romans was still a majestic metropolis, and in a great degree meriting its appellation of the "Queen of the Nations."

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Adina, unconsciously reining up her camel.

"Man cannot destroy the city of God," said the Rabbi, with haughty confidence. "She will stand forever."

"Point out to me, good Rabbi Ben Israel, the prominent places! What is that frowning castle beyond the Temple, which looks so strong and warlike?"

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"That is the 'City of David,' the castle of the kings! It protects the Temple and town. David fortified himself in it, and so did the noble Maccabees. It was built by Melchisedec, the first king of Jerusalem, and the friend of our father Abraham. It is now garrisoned by a thousand Roman soldiers."

The Jewish girl sighed, and then her eyes being attracted by a graceful tower, which the sun-beams of the west burnished like gold, she inquired what it was.

"The one with the palm growing by its side, and nearly as lofty?" asked the Rabbi, who seemed to take pleasure in gratifying the curiosity of his lovely protege.

"Yes, the same."

"That is David's Tower. Upon it David's watchman stood when he was looking for tidings from Absalom; and the wood you see far to the north-east, is the 'Wood of Ephraim,' wherein Prince Absalom was slain."

"And what Palace is that which the setting sun lights up so brilliantly, as if it were covered with plates of silver?"

"That is the Palace of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who reigns in Jerusalem as king. But why do you shudder?" he asked, as he beheld her change countenance; but following the direction of her eyes to the right, he beheld, not far distant, a score of crosses bristling upon a small eminence opposite the city-gate; and two of the crosses held bodies nailed to them, while a guard of soldiers and a crowd of people stood near, looking on, and watching the writhings of the victims. The groans and execrations of one of them distinctly reached the ears of Adina.

"That is the Hill of Calvary, daughter," said the Rabbi, with a look of outward indifference. "It is where the Romans execute their malefactors. Two have suffered today. It is a cruel punishment; not so mild as stoning to death; but the Romans have little feeling. Let us ride on."

On the left they wound round the wall of a garden that seemed to be open to the public, as in some places the enclosure was thrown down. Several persons were seen within, walking up and down, or reclining under the shade of olive trees.

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"That is Solomon's garden, now called Gethsemane," said the Rabbi; "it is now like all the royal woods—desolate."

"Yet beautiful in its desolation, how majestically the walls of the Temple rise heavenward seen from this valley! What noble hill, partly covered with trees, is this behind the garden?"

"Olivet, also a portion of the king's gardens in the days of Israel's glory. The village beyond it is Bethlehem!"

"What, the Bethlehem of Judah, out of which the prophet says shall come a Ruler over Israel?"

"The same; and we look one day to have that prophecy fulfilled. It cheers us with the assurance that Jerusalem shall not forever be trodden down of the nations, but one day have a king and governor of the royal seed of David."

"And do any of the family of David now exist?" asked Adina, fixing her eyes earnestly upon the bearded face of the Rabbi.

"Yes, or the prophecy could not be accomplished. But they are, as far as known, poor and humble; and I have no doubt, that in some parts of the world, among the nations, exists some of the sacred stock, who are reigning princes, as Daniel and Joseph reigned in Persia and Egypt, from whence they shall come as conquerors to rule over Israel."

"How then can they spring from yonder little village of Bethlehem?" asked the maiden.

The Rabbi looked a little embarrassed, and was about to make some reply to this difficult question, when their road was blocked up by a flock of sheep, mingled with a drove of cattle, being driven into the city for the altars of sacrifice. It was with some delay they made their way through those obstacles and came to the gate of Damascus. Here they were detained by the Roman guard, and made to show their passports, and to pay thirty sesterces for every camel, and half as many for each mule in the caravan.

The scene in the streets was quite bewildering to Adina, who had been journeying so many days through a desert; but as the dwellings of the relations of her father was near the gate, she was soon in the arms of her friends, who,

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though they had never seen her before, received her affectionately, as much for her father's sake, who had commended her to their protection, as for her own prepossessing loveliness.

Just entering her seventeenth year, the daughter of the rich Alexandrian was in the prime of female charms. Her hair was raven black, rich and glossy, long, and shining like gold; her face oval, and transparently olive in its color, tinted with the least perceptible roseate; her eyes large, and of the most splendid light and glory of expression; her nose arched and finely outlined, and her mouth exquisitely shaped, with an expression of heavenly sweetness.

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Yours truly,

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From PROFESSOR LONGFELLOW.

CAMBRIDGE, *February 9th*, 1856.

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Accept my compliments on your success, and my thanks for your kind remembrance of me.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

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